

SENDING WORSHIPERS ON A MISSION:
LITURGY FOR MISSIONAL TRANSFORMATION
ACCORDING TO CHRIST'S THREEFOLD OFFICE

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To my children, Jeremiah and Ruth Anna,
because I pledged to prioritize time with you while I worked on this project.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis-project examines whether end-of-worship liturgies designed to equip worshipers for missional participation in Christ's threefold office can play a role in missional transformation. A review of theoretical, practical, and field research literature on missional worship suggests three promising liturgies: intercessory prayers, introduced offerings, and lay commissionings. These liturgies were separately tested at the conclusion of Sunday worship at East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church in Palmyra, NY during the Spring of 2016. Data collected from a focus group before, during, and after indicated that intercessory prayers and commissionings had some impact on worshipers' missional participation in Christ's threefold office.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church (EPCRC) is a rural congregation between Rochester and Syracuse, NY, a region encircled by lakes and home to fruit farms, drumlins, the Erie Canal, and small villages. The congregation was established more than 100 years ago by Dutch immigrants, primarily religious secessionists, and was boosted over the decades by additional waves of immigration, particularly following World War II. During the mid-1990s, the congregation boasted a membership over 300. Twenty years later, amid a changing culture and economy, worship attendance on a typical Sunday has declined to about 80.

In 2009, EPCRC was searching for a pastor. In a profile of their congregation, they had identified their struggles: the congregation was aging, young members often left the area to pursue education and employment and did not return, and the congregation struggled with evangelism. The profile indicated that they would appreciate a pastor who would work at bringing new members into the church, would reach out to inactive members, and would help the congregation relate faith to their daily lives, among other things. The profile did not use the word “missional,” but if EPCRC were in the same situation today, it might: “We struggle with being missional, and we want a pastor who will lead us through missional transformation.”

Talk of being “missional” is now much more common in churches like EPCRC, and the missional transformation of EPCRC is the focus of this thesis-project. The

project is focused on answering this question: Can liturgy play a role in the missional transformation of a traditional, Reformed congregation like EPCRC?

What is Missional?

“Missional” is a newly-coined word, in broad use only since about 2000,¹ and there are reasons to believe that EPCRC should want to be a missional church. A missional church has been defined as “...a reproducing community of authentic disciples, being equipped as missionaries sent by God, to live and proclaim His Kingdom in their world.”² The themes associated with the missional church movement are numerous and varied. In *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile offer a four-fold taxonomy of branches in the missional conversation, describing each branch as a mix of various theological and practical themes.³ Timothy J. Keller attempts to simplify Van Gelder and Zscheile’s taxonomy into four “streams” in the conversation: evangelism, incarnational ministry, contextualization, and reciprocal/communal ministry.⁴ Unfortunately, Keller’s four streams align poorly with Van Gelder and Zscheile’s four branches because Keller focuses only on ministry practice, while Van Gelder and Zscheile include both theological and ministry practice features in each branch.

¹ See Craig VanGelder and Dwight Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 41.

² Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 12.

³ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 67ff.

⁴ Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 256-257.

Perhaps more helpful is Christopher James Schoon's description of the five characteristic emphases of the missional church movement: the *missio dei* (the mission of God), the church as sent to participate in God's mission, incarnational contextualization, an acknowledgment of a post-Christendom context, and a commitment to a holistic gospel.⁵ To organize conceptually all of these themes, it might be helpful to recognize the missional church movement as a three-dimensional movement. The movement takes place in three dimensions, or planes: theology, culture, and ministry. These planes correspond to the three basic missional topics identified by Alan J. Roxburgh and Scott M. Boren.⁶

Theological Plane—*Missio Dei* (the Mission of God)

The missional church movement occurs in a theological plane, involving the doctrine of the *missio dei*, the first theme identified by Schoon. Van Gelder and Zscheile recount that by the middle of the 20th century, missiology was primarily found as a sub-point of the doctrines of the church and of Christ. Rarely was mission discussed as something beyond an activity of the church conducted in obedience to Christ in the Great Commission. Theological developments since then have resulted in missiology playing a major role in every locus of theology.⁷ The idea that mission should be understood as an attribute of the Triune God was developed by Swiss and

⁵ Christopher James Schoon, "Toward a Communally Embodied Gospel: Exploring the Role of Worship in Cultivating an Evangelistic Character among God's People within the Missional Church Movement" (ThD thesis, Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto, 2016), 23-36.

⁶ These three are identified as "gospel," "context," and "church" by Alan J. Roxburgh and Scott M. Boren, in *Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 68-73.

⁷ VanGelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 22-25.

German theologians,⁸ and mission became a theme from which the entire narrative of Scripture is described—the *missio Dei*.⁹ The gospel itself can be given a missional emphasis: “God in love is determined to make things right, to counter the fall and to restore shalom, and in the fullness of time God will accomplish this. This is God’s mission...”¹⁰

This missional theological movement is related to the biblical acknowledgement that God does not just say “*Come to me*” (Isaiah 55:1, Matthew 11:28), God also *sent* his Son into the world to save it (John 3:16-17). Without a missional emphasis, the Bible’s narrative of salvation might tend only to emphasize God gathering his sheep in. In that case, missions would be understood as the task of those Christians whom God has specially called (missionaries) to be like sheep dogs going out to the margins and helping to direct the farthest-off sheep toward him. However, when mission is acknowledged as central to God’s identity and the gospel, it becomes impossible to imagine God as standing still and the sheep coming to him. Instead, God the Father sent Jesus Christ and sends the Holy Spirit to go to the sheep. God is not simply a gatherer but a sender—sending himself and his church into a world that needs to be saved.

Cultural Plane—Post-Christendom

The missional church movement also occurs in a cultural plane. This involves the awareness that the West has entered post-Christendom, the fourth of Schoon’s

⁸ Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 43-44; Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 22-27.

⁹ Craig VanGelder *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 33.

¹⁰ Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 45-46.

emphases. Leslie Newbigin and the Gospel and Our Culture Network are credited with being some of the first to acknowledge the changes occurring in the Western context and interact with the implications for the ministry of the church.¹¹ “The West is now a mission field,” summarize Roxburgh and Boren.¹²

In the past, much of the West was marked by the near-universality of Christian profession, membership in the church, and moral behavior influenced by Christian values—a setting called “Christendom.”¹³ In short, if you can safely assume your new neighbors will claim to be Christian and will value church-going, you live in Christendom. This age is ending in the West.

J. R. Woodward points to religious identification as a sign this age is ending. The number of self-identified “Christians” is dropping markedly and the number of “nones” is rising at the same time.¹⁴ Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider describe their experience living in a post-Christendom environment. The evidence of Christianity was seen all around in buildings and institutions, but, as they write, “To be a Christian was to belong to a religious minority, still relatively numerous, that engaged in the peculiar form of recreational activity called worship.”¹⁵ Signs of emerging post-Christendom in North America include church attendance that is much lower than polls indicate, school activities like graduation ceremonies and sporting events being scheduled for Sunday mornings, the comparative dominance

¹¹ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 49-51.

¹² Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing*, 68.

¹³ Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 259.

¹⁴ J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Praxis-IVP Books, 2012), 29.

¹⁵ Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 19-20.

of individualism and consumerism over Christian discipleship and community, and the fevered pitch with which some are trying to return the culture and government to a Christian foundation.¹⁶ The open acknowledgment that Christendom is coming to an end in the West and will not likely return any time soon is the cultural-plane component of the missional church movement.

Church Ministry Plane—Sent Like Jesus Christ

The missional church movement also occurs in a church ministry plane. There are a number of varied and overlapping themes in this part of the movement, involving most of Keller's four streams and the second, third, and fifth of Schoon's emphases. This aspect of the movement can be understood in relation to the Johannine "Great Commission": "Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:21-22, NIV).¹⁷ In the missional church movement, church ministry is understood in relation to the sending of Jesus Christ. The ministry of the church shares in some way in the direction, the methods, and the goal of Christ's mission.

The ministry of the church shares in the direction of Christ's mission inasmuch as the direction of the church's ministry is aligned with the direction of Christ's sending. As summarized above, in the missional church movement there is a theological conviction that God does not just draw the saved to him; the Father has

¹⁶ Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 261-263.

¹⁷ This biblical text is cited as a key text by some missional authors, like Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 55; and Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 194.

sent Jesus Christ to the world to save the world. The direction is not just toward God but especially from God. There is a similar conviction in the church ministry plane: the direction of church ministry should not only be drawing people toward the church, but especially sending people from the church into the world.

This conviction yields an uneasiness in the missional church movement about attractional ministry, in which church leadership “engineer[s] the church ‘product’ to attract their preferred clientele.”¹⁸ The attractional model is often (but not always) associated with large buildings, expensive production of a “worship experience,” and rapid growth from the transfer of Christians from other congregations.¹⁹ This approach to ministry has resulted from a non-missional understanding of the story of Scripture, argue Roxburgh and Boren: “One of the ways the basic story of the gospel has been compromised is that it has become all about *us* and how God is supposed to meet *our need*, and we have created attractional churches that are about how God does just that. This deforms God’s story... The gospel story is about *God*, not us; it is about what *God is doing* for the sake of the world...”²⁰ (emphasis added).

In the missional church movement, there is also a conviction that church ministry should share in the methods of Christ’s mission inasmuch as the church should imitate Christ. Often this involves using the analogy of the incarnation. Van Gelder and Zscheile summarize: “The Word was made flesh in Jesus, and the church

¹⁸ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

¹⁹ Frost, *Road to Missional*, 19-21.

²⁰ Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing*, 69-70.

as the body of Christ must continue to be enfleshed in every human culture and moment in mission.”²¹ The imitation of Christ’s methods also involves an emphasis on reciprocal ministry—not only giving hospitality but also receiving the hospitality of others.²² After all, in “making his dwelling among us,” (John 1:14), Jesus was known to accept the hospitality of others (see, for example, Luke 5:27-32, 19:1-10).

Finally, in the missional church movement there is a conviction that church ministry should share in the goal of Christ’s sending. Like Jesus, the church should bring the grace of God to the world in word and deed. One key concept here is contextualization: the work of bridging between contexts to bring the gospel message into a new cultural setting. Concern about the ways the source culture has influenced the expression of the gospel in the work of contextualization is characteristic of the missional church movement.²³ Another key concept is the kingdom of God. Living according to the kingdom is often described positively, as hopeful engagement with the culture through the pursuit of justice and urban well-being, for example. Kingdom living also has a negative aspect, which involves critically engaging with the culture, critiquing individualism, consumerism, self-absorption, and rationalism, and establishing the church as a contrasting or alternative community—a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom of God.²⁴

²¹ VanGelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 114.

²² Frost, *Road to Missional*, 121-140; Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 132-135.

²³ For example, Hirsch and Catchim, *Permanent Revolution*, 194-195; Keller, *Center Church*, 101-106.

²⁴ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 222-243; Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 75-84; Keller, *Center Church*, 181-243, 259-260; Woodward, *Creating*, 28.

“Mission” has traditionally been understood in terms of obedience to Christ, following the “Great Commission” in Matthew’s gospel:²⁵ “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV). This has meant that the church in Western Christendom often made a distinction between “missions” and “evangelism.” Going to all nations and baptizing is an especially apt description for the task of sending missionaries to non-Western countries to establish churches.²⁶ In contrast, the church’s own backyard has already been “gone to,” and people have already been baptized. The task at home seems different—not mission, but evangelism; not going to your neighbors, but attracting them to church (often, back to church) in order to be instructed and edified by a gospel which is probably familiar to them. In this way, the church in Christendom has often assumed a clean distinction between missions as sending to foreign lands, and evangelism as attracting neighbors to church.²⁷

The missional church movement approaches the ministry of the church differently. Being the church is less about attraction and more about mission—about being sent according to the direction, methods, and goal of Christ’s sending. The church goes to the neighbors, lives among them as Jesus did, contextualizing and participating in the Kingdom of God. Just as the missional church movement

²⁵ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 24.

²⁶ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God*, 86-88.

²⁷ Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 40-41.

understands mission as a feature of all theology (and not just a sub-discipline of ecclesiology), mission undergirds the whole work of the church.²⁸

Does EPCRC Need Missional Transformation?

If the missional church movement has correctly understood theology and culture as described above, then congregations like East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church (EPCRC) in the post-Christendom West need to pay attention and consider the church-ministry emphases of the missional church movement. In fact, a study in 2014 indicated that EPCRC might indeed benefit from being transformed into a more missional congregation.

In June of 2014, the council members of EPCRC heard an evening presentation by the pastor. He described a missional theology and how it might benefit the congregation. The emphasis was on church leadership equipping the whole congregation for participation in Christ's threefold office as the congregation is sent out into the world. Afterward, the council members met for forty-five minutes as a focus group to explore the relationship between the theology described in the presentation and the theology implicit in practice at EPCRC. The responses to two of the main points of the presentation suggested that EPCRC could indeed benefit from a transformation to a more missional emphasis.

The presentation's first main point was that utilizing the doctrine of Christ's threefold office could help overcome a lack of "missional imagination." Equipped with this theology, congregants might better imagine what the sending of Jesus Christ would mean for particular people in particular situations. Focus group

²⁸ Van Gelder, *Ministry*, 85-88.

participants suggested that questions about the church's mission and struggles to engage in it were common at EPCRC. One participant specifically confirmed that the "lack of missional imagination" was a problem at EPCRC. This participant explained that the comprehensive view of God's mission provided by the theology of Christ's threefold office was a new to him and more helpful than the church growth strategies he had heard from other sources.

The second main point of the presentation was that a theology of participation in Christ's threefold office can help to overcome a pessimism about the church's future and potential for fruitful ministry. The focus group conversation revealed that some aspects of the theology of participation in Christ's threefold office were familiar to participants. More than one participant also made reference to the pessimism described, affirming that it was indeed suppressing the ministry of the church. One participant countered that reticence to leave personal comfort zones was even more likely to suppress the church's ministry.

Taken together, the data collected from this focus group suggested that a lack of missional imagination, a spirit of pessimism, and a reticence to leave personal comfort zones impeded the ministry of EPCRC. This might indicate that EPCRC could benefit from a transformation. The data also confirms that some of the themes of the missional church movement could be an essential part of this transformation.

Why Focus on Liturgy?

This thesis-project is aimed specifically at Sunday morning liturgy in its focus on the missional transformation of EPCRC. A second research project, conducted in 2015, pointed in this direction.

If missional transformation means shifting beyond “attractional” ministry, then worship in a missional church will be related to mission in a very different way than in a church with an attractional ministry. Worship will not focus primarily on attracting the unchurched but on equipping and sending the worshipers to contextualize the story of God’s mission and live according to the kingdom in gospel-shaped humility. The relationship between worship and mission will be investigated in detail in chapters two and three of this thesis-project.

Two surveys conducted in 2015 examined this connection between Sunday worship and the daily lives of worshipers. The data collected from these surveys suggested that worship could potentially play a role in missional transformation at EPCRC.²⁹ The first survey asked three questions about how well the respondents could describe what they experienced in worship. Respondents gave themselves high scores. The overwhelmingly positive self-reported values could be explained in a number of ways. Perhaps respondents wanted to encourage their pastor, who was conducting the survey. Perhaps respondents wanted to grade themselves well because they think of themselves as attentive worshipers. But the responses, taken at face value, indicate that worshipers are paying close attention to the liturgy.

Respondents reported this was particularly true of the charge at the end of the liturgy. The charge might seem to be more like the prayer of confession than the sermon. Both the charge and the prayer of confession are just a few sentences long, while the sermon fills half of the worship time. However, respondents indicated they

²⁹ The Appendix contains a summary of the methodology and results of the surveys.

remembered the sermon and the charge similarly well, and both comparatively better than the prayer of confession.

A second survey, conducted some weeks later, explored the connections between the liturgy and what the worshipers did in the week that followed. It should be noted that response rates for both surveys were more than 90% of the total attendance, and attendance at EPCRC is very stable. It can be assumed that the majority of respondents to one survey also responded to the other. The responses to this second survey were significantly more negative. Only about a third of respondents reported doing something specifically in response to worship.

If the data collected on these two specific Sundays are representative, then worshipers are often confident that they remember the liturgy, but only moderately confident that the liturgy has any relationship to what they do in humble contextualization and kingdom living—their missional activity.

If respondents had given similarly negative responses to both surveys, this might have indicated a more pressing task: finding ways to get worshipers to be more attentive to what is happening in worship. If respondents had given similarly positive responses to both surveys, this might have indicated that congregants are missional at least with respect to the impact of the liturgy. In that case, this thesis-project might have focused on whether some other aspect of the congregation's shared life could be adjusted in order to facilitate missional transformation. However, worshipers indicated they were attentive but not responsive to the liturgy. This suggests that worship holds potential for playing a role in the missional transformation of EPCRC.

This Thesis-Project

The 2014 leadership focus group and the two 2015 surveys of worshipers did not produce particularly rich data, nor were they designed to. It is possible all is relatively well at EPCRC in comparison with similar data collected in other congregations. Nevertheless, the data from those surveys in combination with the severe membership decline recorded since the 1990s does serve as an initial indication that EPCRC could benefit from a missional transformation facilitated by liturgy. This thesis-project proposes that liturgical practices designed to equip worshipers for missional participation in Christ's threefold office might play a role in this transformation.

This chapter has outlined the problem and the research question: It seems that EPCRC, like many churches in the West, could benefit from a missional transformation, becoming a congregation that understands God's mission as foundational to all theology, that acknowledges the post-Christendom context, and that shifts beyond attractional ministry to missional ministry characterized by humbly residing in the neighborhood, contextualizing the gospel, and living according to the kingdom of God. Some earlier field research suggests that liturgy could play a role in this missional transformation at EPCRC.

The second chapter describes theological foundations or presuppositions underlying this project. The first presupposition is that the doctrine of Christ's three-fold office offers a Reformed and missional understanding of God's mission in Jesus Christ. This was one of the major points included in the 2014 presentation cited above. The second presupposition is that the doctrine of every believer's

participation in Christ's three-fold office offers a Reformed and missional model for relating the church's mission to the mission of God in Jesus Christ. This presupposition is a way of synthesizing some of the themes present in the church ministry plane of the missional church movement, but in a way that will feel indigenous to an established Reformed congregation like EPCRC. The third presupposition is that leadership characterized by equipping and experimentation both fits within the missional church movement and is appropriate for the transformation of an established congregation like EPCRC. The fourth presupposition is that the church's regular worship is an appropriate venue for this kind of missional transformation. The exposition of this final presupposition will add theological footing to what was suggested by the 2015 surveys described above.

The third chapter reviews representative literature on missional worship. The first part of the review focuses on a major theoretical question: Should worship be used as an instrument for mission? The literature contains a number of answers to this question, some negative and some affirmative. A review and synthesis of these answers shows a way to unite the second and fourth theological presuppositions and to arrive at a definition for "missional worship." The second part of the chapter uses this definition to review the practical liturgical suggestions in the missional worship literature and to catalog those practices that qualify as missional worship practice suggestions for EPCRC. The third part of the chapter surveys field research on missional worship, concluding that this research project will make a unique contribution in a relatively under-studied area of church ministry.

The fourth chapter describes the testing of the thesis that liturgical practices designed to equip worshipers for missional participation in Christ's threefold office can facilitate missional transformation. A series of liturgical "experiments" were conducted in worship at EPCRC during the Spring of 2016. Missional liturgies were evaluated through four conversations with a focus group representing cross-section of worshipers. The focus group convened on Sunday mornings before worship before, during, and after the missional liturgies were implemented. On the Sunday of the first focus group meeting, a three-week trial of one end-of-worship practice began. The Sunday following that three-week trial, the focus group met again. During that Sunday's liturgy, a second three-week trial of a different end-of-worship practice began. This pattern continued a third time, at the end of which the focus group met to provide feedback on all the end-of-worship liturgies.

The fifth chapter describes the outcomes of the project, including a description, analysis, and interpretation of the data collected during the focus group conversations and some observations made by the researcher. Before the project was conducted, it was expected that including these liturgical elements at the conclusion of Sunday worship would have a positive impact on the worshipers' participation in mission. The data suggests that this happened and thereby confirms the thesis that liturgical practices can play a role in missional transformation by forming worshipers for missional participation according to Christ's threefold office.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

This thesis-project evaluates whether liturgies designed to equip worshipers for participation in Christ's threefold office can facilitate the missional transformation of an established, Reformed congregation. This chapter describes four presuppositions underlying this thesis-project: (A) the doctrine of Christ's three-fold office offers a fitting Reformed and a missional understanding of God's mission in Jesus Christ; (B) the doctrine of every believer's participation in Christ's three-fold office offers both a Reformed and a missional model for relating the church's mission to the mission of God in Jesus Christ; (C) leadership characterized by equipping and experimentation is both missional and appropriate for the transformation of an established congregation like East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church; and (D) the church's regular worship can facilitate this kind of missional transformation.

A. The Mission of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King

God the Father has sent his Son into the world to save it (John 3:17). God the Father and God the Son have sent God the Holy Spirit to administer the salvation of the Son to the world (John 14:26, 15:26). God is a sending God, a missionary God. His very character involves sending in order to save. This conviction is commonly expressed in the theological plane of the missional church movement. More can be said to describe God's missionary character. This thesis-project presupposes that the doctrine of Christ's threefold office provides a theology of God's mission that is particularly appropriate for East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church (EPCRC). It is

appropriate because it is a familiar doctrine at ECPRC and because it satisfies the expectation within the missional conversation that the mission of God is something expansive.

Missional Expectations

Penitence has long been at the heart of Protestant piety. As a result, Protestants have often narrowed the doctrine of salvation to the individual and the mission of God to forgiveness. The missional church movement coincides with a shift toward a more communal view of salvation and doctrine of the mission of God that emphasizes the kingdom.¹ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile argue that this shift—a renewed focus on the kingdom of God—is even at the heart of the missional church movement. The understanding of the mission of God in salvation has broadened.² In the missional church movement, there is an expectation that the mission of God will be described in broad terms—much broader than the forgiveness of sins.

Michael Frost is representative of those in the missional church movement who expect a broader understanding of God's mission: "...one of the dead giveaways you're not missional yet is speaking of mission in the same terms that we once used when speaking of evangelism."³ For Frost, those "terms" are specifically the language of attractional ministry and church growth. The second presupposition of this project is about the ministry of the church, and this topic will be examined in

¹ Thomas H. Schattauer, "Liturgical Assembly as Locus of Mission," in *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission*, ed. Thomas H. Schattauer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 8-9.

² Craig VanGelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 28-29.

³ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 23.

more detail there. However, Frost points to the way one talks about the church's mission as the evidence of whether one thinks of the mission of God "missionally." A missional church will talk the church's mission in terms of both evangelism and social involvement. A missional church will talk about demonstrating the kingship of Jesus Christ because the missional church movement assumes that God's mission is something much broader than forgiving sinners.⁴

In *Center Church*, Timothy J. Keller similarly describes the expansiveness of God's mission and the gospel. He lists the many fronts of church ministry as part of his exploration of the many things that the gospel means.⁵ Keller references the concerns of those like Kevin DeYoung and Gregory D. Gilbert, who argue for a position that proceeds from the traditional penitence-based piety: mission should be understood only in terms of the proclamation of the word aimed at reconciling sinners with God. Deeds of mercy are the consequence of mission, but they should not be confused with it.⁶ Keller is sensitive to this and warns missional churches both to emphasize individual salvation and at the same time to focus on much more than evangelism.⁷

While DeYoung and Gilbert take a position outside of the missional church movement, Frost and Keller represent poles on a continuum of opinion within that movement. Frost argues that evangelism should not be prioritized over social

⁴ Frost, *Road to Missional*, 23-28.

⁵ Timothy J. Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 39-52, 291-295.

⁶ Kevin DeYoung and Gregory D. Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 241.

⁷ Keller, *Center Church*, 264-275.

action.⁸ Keller argues that the social consequences of the gospel should not be confused with the gospel itself, which is a report of Christ's finished work.⁹ Nevertheless, both Keller and Frost agree: God's mission should be described as something broader than forgiving sinners. It should be described as the coming of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. That is the expectation in the missional church movement.

Mission in Christ's Threefold Office

The doctrine of Christ's threefold office is part of the confessional heritage of Reformed churches. Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 31 reads:

Q. 31. Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed"?

A. 31. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be

- our chief prophet and teacher who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance;
- our only high priest who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father;
- and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.¹⁰

Applied to the mission of God, this doctrine offers a theology that satisfies the missional expectation for a broad description God's mission in Jesus Christ.

As prophet, Jesus Christ "fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance." The denominational editions of the catechism printed by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) notably cite Acts 3:22, in which Peter identifies Jesus Christ as the "prophet like Moses." Jesus was also

⁸ Frost, *Road to Missional*, 27-28.

⁹ Keller, *Center Church*, 31.

¹⁰ *Our Faith: Ecumenical Creeds, Reformed Confessions, and Other Resources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013), 79.

recognized by his contemporaries as different than the teachers of the law because “he taught as one who had authority” (Matthew 7:29, Mark 1:22, Luke 4:32). In describing this doctrine, John Calvin focused on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as prophet: “outside Christ there is nothing worth knowing... in the sum of doctrine as he has given it to us all parts of perfect wisdom are contained.”¹¹ Zacharias Ursinus, the principal author of the Heidelberg Catechism, distinguished between three tasks Jesus performs as prophet: he reveals God and his will, he institutes the gospel ministry, and by this ministry he creates faith.¹² In terms of Christ’s prophetic office, God’s work in Jesus Christ includes the realm of human knowledge and the seemingly unsolvable problems of ignorance and doubt.¹³

As priest, Jesus Christ “has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, and... continually pleads our cause with the Father.” Hebrews 7 is perhaps the chief text which reveals Jesus Christ as the Great High Priest. Calvin focused on the reconciling work of Christ in his sacrifice and his ongoing intercession.¹⁴ Ursinus identified four priestly tasks of Christ: teaching, offering himself as a sacrifice, interceding eternally, and applying forgiveness.¹⁵ This reconciling sacrifice has effects beyond an individual’s conscience. In Christ’s sacrifice, accounts are settled and debts forgiven before God. This creates the possibility for human relations to be defined

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., The Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), II, xv, 1-2.

¹² Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), 173.

¹³ Robert Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 219-261.

¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, xv, 6.

¹⁵ Ursinus, *Commentary*, 175.

not simply by fairness but by forgiveness, generosity, and love.¹⁶ In terms of Christ's priestly office, God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ includes forgiveness and love—that is, the realms of conscience, guilt, human relationships, reconciliation, and love.

As king, Jesus Christ “governs us by his Word and Spirit, and... guards us and keeps us in the freedom he has won for us.” Jesus Christ endorsed the understanding that he was the eschatological king when he spoke of his kingdom and, among other things, mounted a donkey to ride into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecy (John 12:14-15; Zechariah 9:9). Calvin wrote of the eternal security that Christ the King provides for the church and for believers. His is a spiritual kingship rather than a temporal kingship, and it is a kingship which gives assurance and confidence to people living in temporal misery.¹⁷ Ursinus identified three royal tasks: ruling the church by Word and Spirit, preserving the church in the midst of enemies, and finally distributing the spoils of liberation from all evil.¹⁸ Christ's kingly rule is not what the world expects from a king. It is a humble kingship and one that is not identified with any particular secular political movement. Nevertheless, by Christ's kingship God gives victory over all the powers of evil—political evil, social evil, natural evil, all the way to death itself.¹⁹ The doctrine of Jesus Christ as king thus teaches that God's redemptive work includes victory that

¹⁶ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 169ff.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II, xv, 3-5.

¹⁸ Ursinus, *Commentary*, 176.

¹⁹ See Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 116ff for a detailed exegetical theology of Christ as Priest.

encompasses the realms of politics, justice, and even human health, but in a way that transcends them.

The theology of Christ's threefold office can be used to categorize the many ways that God's mission in Jesus Christ touches on every aspect of human experience. Some have even argued that the threefold nature of Christ's office has roots deeper than the three anointed offices in Old Testament Israel. The Dutch theologians Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper argued that the threefold office of Christ arises from human nature itself and the meaning of creation "in God's image": the prophetic office is related to the head and the call to know God, the priestly office to the heart and the call to love God, and the kingly office to the hands and the call to glorify God.²⁰

The theology of Christ's threefold office provides a broad view of God's mission in Jesus Christ, satisfying the expectations of those in the missional church movement. This doctrine has also been influential in the CRC, particularly in discussions of the dimensions of church office.²¹ A 2014 focus group at EPCRC indicated that the doctrine is also familiar in that congregation. For all of these reasons, this thesis-project first presupposes that the doctrine of Christ's threefold office provides a fitting theology of mission to undergird missional transformation at EPCRC.

²⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 367. See also Hendrinus DeMoor, "Equipping the Saints: A Church Political Study of the Controversies Surrounding Ecclesiastical Office in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, 1857-1982" (ThD thesis, Theologische Academie uitgaande van de Johannes Calvijn-Stichting, Kampen, 1986), esp. 205-207.

²¹ DeMoor, "Equipping the Saints," 216-224.

B. The Mission of the Church

Jesus Christ said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21, NIV). There is a relationship between his sending and the sending of his church.

What conceptual model might the church use for understanding that relationship?

The second theological presupposition of this thesis project is that the participation-in-Christ model is a fitting Reformed and missional model for understanding the church’s mission and its relationship to the mission of Christ. In fact, it appears that this model satisfies the missional expectations better than the common incarnational model.

Missional Expectations

Within the missional conversation, use of the incarnation as a model for missional ministry is nearly ubiquitous.²² Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim specifically argue that John 20:21 teaches incarnational ministry: just as God brought the Word of salvation to humans in human flesh, so the church must bring the kingdom of God into each context by taking on the “flesh” of that context.²³ Imitating the incarnation is the way the church relates its mission to Christ’s mission. The use of the incarnational model is related to two expectations for a theology of Christian ministry within that conversation: an emphasis on Christ-empowerment and discouraging cultural imperialism.

²² Van Gelder and Zscheile, (in *Missional Church in Perspective*, 4, 115) note the prominence of this analogy.

²³ Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 60, 194ff.

Frost's chapter on incarnational ministry in *The Road to Missional* is like many descriptions of incarnational ministry: Members of the church should live near those to whom they would bear witness, moving into the neighborhood. They shouldn't merely try to communicate with them but should minister the presence of Christ to them, believing that God is already at work among their neighbors. Frost clarifies that he does not mean that the ministry or ministers are somehow a literal incarnation of the Son of God. Rather, the church follows the model of the incarnation in the way it communicates the message of the gospel to the world.²⁴ Frost's description is representative of many in the missional conversation who expect that an effective model of missional ministry will emphasize that Christ's ministry should empower ours. The assumption is that the incarnational model satisfies this expectation, drawing as it does upon the nature of Christ to describe the nature of ministry.

The incarnational model can also be effective in disabusing those engaged in mission of the notion that their culturally-contextualized understandings of the gospel are the gospel in pure form and of the assumption that applying the gospel to another culture is a matter of simply importing their culturally-contextualized understanding of the gospel into that culture.²⁵ In other words, the incarnational model is used to discourage cultural imperialism.

Incarnational ministry has certainly reaped benefits along those lines, which Todd Billings catalogues: In youth ministry, talk of incarnational ministry has

²⁴ Frost, *Road to Missional*, 121-140.

²⁵ See Timothy Keller, *Center Church*, 89ff for a summary of the problem of contextualization.

encouraged a move from program-based approaches to relationship-based approaches. Those involved in urban ministry have moved into the neighborhoods they seek to reach. Missiologists have successfully encouraged missionaries to move out of their “compounds.” Local churches have been encouraged by the analogy to be more outward focused.²⁶ Based on these results alone, the incarnational model seems to have satisfied the second expectation: that an effective model of missional ministry will discourage cultural imperialism.

A Brief Critique of the Incarnational Model

While the model of the incarnation has certainly reaped benefits, it suffers some weaknesses. Billings catalogs a number of them. To begin with, when the incarnation is mustered to prove a theological point about the proper method of ministry, an appeal to the incarnation is often unnecessary. For example, the model of the incarnation has been used to encourage identifying with a recipient culture, associating with people of every social class, and being humble. These are indeed important for mission, but one does not need to appeal to the doctrine of the incarnation to demonstrate that these are important.²⁷ Not only is the incarnation often unnecessarily appealed to, but the incarnation as a model for ministry suffers two additional, serious weaknesses. They arise again and again in Billings’ critique, and they are especially troubling because they appear at exactly the supposed strong points of the model: promoting Christ-empowered mission and discouraging cultural imperialism.

²⁶ J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 124-125.

²⁷ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 129.

First, the incarnation as an analogy can become discouraging rather than empowering because the incarnation is too strong an analogy as a model for mission. The event of the incarnation was a perfect union of two natures in one person. Jesus is fully God and fully human. If anything like this is the believer's goal in mission, it is an unattainable goal.²⁸ The problem with unattainable goals is that they (like God's perfect law) end up crushing rather than motivating a person, convincing them of their inability. The model of the incarnation is deceptive for this reason. It relies on a key redemptive doctrine, and so appears to be a gospel-centered model, but it has the force of law instead.

A second weakness of the incarnational model that surfaces again and again in Billings' critique is the tendency of the incarnational analogy to promote cultural imperialism, rather than working against it. Billings explains that when the incarnation—the uniting of the divine and human natures in one person in order to accomplish reconciliation between the human with the divine—is used as a model for contextualization, the recipient culture is likely to be identified with the human nature, and the missionary or the missionary's source culture is likely to be identified with the divine nature. The danger is that this turns the (Western) missionary's very presence in the (non-Western) culture into a redemptive act.²⁹ This tends toward the very cultural imperialism that the incarnational model is supposed to avoid. To state this another way, when using the incarnation as an

²⁸ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 125; Al Tizon, *Missional Preaching: Engage, Embrace, Transform* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012), 40.

²⁹ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 131, 135. This critique is especially devastating if one includes the Lutheran doctrine of the communication of attributes according to the *genus maiestaticum* as VanGelder and Zschiele do (*The Missional Church in Perspective*, 114).

analogy for mission, it isn't clear what the analogy is. "The divine nature is to the human nature as [_____] is to the recipient culture." What belongs in this blank? The problematic tendency is to place the missionary, with her host culture, in the blank. If instead the gospel is put in that blank, then the missionary has no place in an analogy that is supposed to provide a model for her place in the practice of missional ministry.³⁰ While the model of the incarnation is expected to lead away from cultural imperialism, and no doubt often has, it threatens to lead in exactly the opposite direction.

It must be emphasized that neither of these two weaknesses renders the model ineffective. The use of the incarnation as an analogy for ministry has reaped great benefits, and it is possible to use the incarnational model without falling into these errors. Van Gelder and Zscheile are among those who endorse it while explicitly warning against one of the errors: making incarnational ministry merely a matter of trying to imitate Christ. They urge believers to see the relationship between their missional work and Christ's as one of participation, not imitation.³¹ Nevertheless, it remains a weakness of the incarnational analogy that the very places where it is supposed to satisfy expectations in the missional conversation—expectations for Christ-empowered mission and against cultural imperialism—are those where the analogy seems apt to disappoint.

³⁰ Keller's struggle in *Center Church* to critique the "two-way bridge" model of contextualization succinctly and offer the "gospel spiral" as an alternative (103-106) seems to stem from this very problem.

³¹ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 109ff, especially 114.

Participation in Christ's Threefold Office

The participation-in-Christ model offers an alternative to the incarnational model. The theme of participation in Christ has long been a part of the missional conversation,³² even if it has at times been overshadowed by the incarnational model. The participation-in-Christ model better emphasizes the agency of God in the concrete work of Jesus Christ and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. It also better navigates between the themes of union with Christ and the asymmetry between Christ and the believer.³³

The participation-in-Christ model for understanding mission is a biblical model. Herman Ridderbos argues that this is the entire focus of Jesus Christ's "Farewell Discourse" in chapters 13 through 16 of the Gospel of John: "Three focal points are prominent here: the progress of Jesus' work and the involvement of his disciples in it... the assistance of the Spirit... and Jesus' ongoing fellowship with his own..."³⁴ Jesus spoke of his disciples' participation in his mission when he said, for example: "anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing" (John 14:12, NIV). In the face of this overwhelming task, Jesus comforted his disciples by promising his presence with them in the Holy Spirit: "...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you... On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:16, 18, 20, NIV). Jesus repeatedly spoke of

³² See, for example, J. G. Davies, *Worship and Mission* (New York: Association Press, 1967), 29-30.

³³ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 145, 150ff. See also VanGelder and Zscheile's plea for missional theology to better emphasize the agency of God (*Missional Church in Perspective*, 109-111).

³⁴ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 496.

the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit, even linking the Holy Spirit's work with their participation in his work: "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify" (John 15:26-27, NIV).

In addition, in the "High Priestly Prayer" that follows, Jesus describes the mission of his disciples and all believers as participation in his redemptive, and specifically priestly, work: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (John 17:17-19, NIV). It is also true that missional unity among believers will proceed from their participation in Christ's priestly work, bringing unity between God and humanity: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21, NIV).

The theme seems to culminate in the Johannine "Great Commission": "Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:21-22, NIV).

In his first epistle, John further describes this missional participation in Christ by the Holy Spirit using the language of receiving an anointing from Christ (1 John 2:20). These are perhaps the most striking texts which show that the participation-in-Christ model of mission is a biblical model.

The participation-in-Christ model also has a home in Reformed confessional theology. Question and Answer 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism reads:

Q. 32. But why are you called a Christian?

A. 32. Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed

- to confess his name,
- to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks,
- to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for eternity.³⁵

The bulleted clauses correspond to Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices, respectively.

This theology teaches believers to see their calling as union with Christ, a sharing or participation in Christ's threefold office. This is taught in Scripture inasmuch as believers are called "Christians," taking on the name of the "anointed one," as the catechism suggests. Believers are also said to have received Christ's anointing (1 John 2:27). Both Christ and his people receive a sign and seal of this anointing in baptism, and Robert Sherman suggests that Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism points toward a theology of a threefold office.³⁶ Finally, the church is, variously, said to be made of prophets (Acts 2:17), priests (Revelation 1:6), and kings (those who reign as in Romans 5:17 and 2 Timothy 2:12). These three are spoken of together in 1 Peter 2:9—the church is *royal* and a *priesthood* so that it may *declare* the praises of God.³⁷

Aspects of participation in Christ can be distinguished not only according to the three offices of Christ but also according to three "orientations". Reformed theology maintains a strict distinction between justification and sanctification while

³⁵ *Our Faith*, 80.

³⁶ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 107ff.

³⁷ Keller (*Center Church*, 345-346) offers a catalog of texts showing that believers are called prophets, priests, and kings.

affirming their unity. Believers receive these “together and conjointly” through union with Christ, and the two are “inseparable.”³⁸ In *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, Billings describes this as a distinction between union with Christ as a matter of passive reception and union as a matter of active participation.³⁹ Justification and sanctification are distinct but united benefits of union with Christ, and they represent two different orientations of God’s grace. Oriented inward toward the believer, the grace of sharing in Christ’s anointing is a matter of justification. The believer benefits from Christ’s threefold office by receiving his work as a gift. Oriented outward from the believer, sharing in Christ’s anointing is a matter of sanctification. The believer lives a new life of participation in Christ’s office.

This outward orientation can be further distinguished, as Renee S. House suggests, into a God-ward orientation and a human-ward orientation. In sanctification, a believer participating in the grace of God faces in two directions: toward God in love and toward neighbor in love.⁴⁰ According to the threefold office of Christ and these three orientations, sharing in Christ’s threefold office can have nine distinct aspects. Because believers are participating in all of these aspects simultaneously, sometimes within the same activity, it can be hard to draw distinct boundaries between some of them. They can be roughly described like this:

³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xi, 6.

³⁹ See Billings’ excellent description of Calvin’s own careful distinction in *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 106-108.

⁴⁰ Renee S. House, “Becoming a ‘Missional’ Denomination for the 21st Century: A Constructive Analysis of Theology and Specific Practices in the Reformed Church in America,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2008.

Threefold Office of Christ				
Orientation		Prophet	Priest	King
	Inward	Believing	Being Forgiven	Freedom from Sin's Dominion
	God-ward	Praise	Whole-Life Devotion	Progressive Sanctification
	Human-ward	Witnessing	Forgiving Others/ Self-Sacrifice	Engaging the World

Table 1. Aspects of Union with Christ

House posits that it is in this third orientation, outward toward human beings (shaded in the chart above), that classic Reformed theology contains a doctrine of mission as a matter of participation in Christ.⁴¹ Believers are *sent out* to participate in God's work in Jesus Christ as prophet, priest, and king in their actions toward and among others. This missional theology can satisfy the "missional" expectations for Christ-empowerment and cultural humility.

First, to participate in Christ's prophetic office is to "confess his name." Christ is the true prophet—the truth is found in him. Christians participate in this office as they are called and enabled by the Spirit to know and speak the truth.⁴² This outward participation involves both a God-ward and a human-ward orientation. "Confessing" is not simply something believers do in their hearts before God. It also involves witness to the gospel, applying the word of God not just to their own lives but to the lives of others.⁴³

This missional theology of participation in Christ's prophetic office encourages gospel-empowered ministry. Christ is not simply the Prophet; he is the

⁴¹ House, "Becoming," 313-324.

⁴² Billings, *Union with Christ*, 162-163; Ursinus, *Commentary*, 179.

⁴³ Keller, *Center Church*, 272, 345; House, "Becoming," 316-317.

prophecy (the Word), and the one who gives the power to proclaim (the Spirit). Because of this, the message proclaimed is something powerful, personal, and life-changing.⁴⁴ Participation theology teaches that when believers set out to make the Word known in the world, they do not simply act as prophets imitating Christ, hoping to somehow be as persuasive as Christ himself (as though they too could speak as those “who have authority”). Rather, they participate in Christ’s prophetic work in union with him, empowered by him. A believer’s witnessing can be life-changing and powerful for others because as they speak of Jesus Christ, he reveals himself by the power of his Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ With a theology of participation in Christ’s threefold office, believers are sent out not with the burden of trying to be like the Prophet Jesus Christ but with the confidence that the Word Jesus Christ reveals Himself. 1 Corinthians 2 teaches this, emphasizing the Spirit’s power in the proclamation of the gospel.

This theology also encourages cultural humility. The truth proclaimed is the Word Jesus Christ, not some tradition’s theological perspective. The truth becomes real, personal, and life-changing not finally through the personalities of the human instruments God uses to proclaim the truth, but through the work of the Spirit of Christ in the hearts of those who hear. In other words, the temptation toward cultural imperialism is minimized when a person knows that it is Jesus Christ who does the teaching and converting by his Spirit. A believer publicly confessing the

⁴⁴ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 256-261.

⁴⁵ See Calvin, *Institutes*, II, xv, 2, specifically commenting on preaching: “...he received anointing, not only for himself that he might carry out the office of teaching, but for his whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the continuing preaching of the gospel.”

truth is a third party to the truth and its power. It neither resides in her, nor is it finally persuasive by her. 1 Corinthians 2 teaches this well also, emphasizing the Spirit's power over against human eloquence.

Second, to share in Christ's priestly office is to "present [oneself] to him as a living sacrifice of thanks" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 32). In the Old Testament cultic context, the concept of priesthood is dominated by the offering of sacrifices to God. Sherman describes how Jesus Christ has transformed the priestly office and transforms the believer's participation in it: in the priestly work of Jesus Christ, it is not just that humanity has made an offering to God but that God has made the sacrifice on behalf of humanity.⁴⁶ Likewise, a believer's priestly work is no longer about offering sacrifices to God for forgiveness, for merit, and for communing with God. Rather than working *for* reconciliation with God, believers work *from* reconciliation. To participate in Christ's priestly office surely involves that inward orientation: peace for consciences, confidence in prayer, and freedom in worship of God on the basis of the accomplished reconciliation with God.⁴⁷ However, participation in Christ's priestly office also involves God-ward and human-ward orientations, and the first leads directly to the second. The progression from worshiping God at the beginning of Romans 12 to loving others at the end of that chapter is one clear biblical illustration of this. Believers live in unity with each other and work toward reconciliation as a human-ward testimony to Jesus Christ's reconciling work. Believers also take on the needs of others in intercession and

⁴⁶ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 186-194.

⁴⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xv.6; Ursinus, *Commentary*, 179-180.

service in the confidence that they and others ultimately receive all they need in Jesus Christ. Believers additionally work for justice and reconciliation not in an effort to balance the scales and settle the accounts but in forgiveness, generosity, and love, knowing that the scales have already been balanced eternally in favor of the repentant.⁴⁸

This missional theology of participation in Christ's priestly office encourages gospel-empowered ministry, for it teaches believers to live as a church and to live with respect to the world on the basis of prior reconciliation with God and other believers and on the basis of satisfaction in Christ. For example, believers give their time and resources to others not simply to imitate Christ's self-giving but because Christ has given himself so that believers are confident that they have all they need.

A theology of missional participation in Christ's priestly office encourages cultural humility as well. One danger in contextualization is that Western believers will try to Westernize non-Western people in their efforts to love them. But to understand the work of mercy and love as a participation in Christ's priestly office is to understand that the source and goal of a believer's self-giving and sacrifice is reconciliation and satisfaction with God in Christ. Believers participate in Christ's priestly work, reflecting his self-giving love while never neglecting the truth that Christ's self-giving is the only redemptive sacrifice.⁴⁹ In other words, love and mercy toward others is finally about riches in Christ. A believer's loving, giving, and working toward reconciliation with others cannot be complete unless they know the

⁴⁸ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 213-218; Keller, *Center Church*, 272, 345.

⁴⁹ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 163-164.

love and reconciliation of God. This theology is on display in texts like Ephesians 2 and Romans 14, where the prior reconciling work of God becomes the foundation and the goal for our efforts at reconciliation and love to others. Billings describes it this way: “Unlike Christ’s sacrifice, our sacrifice of thanksgiving (in our lives of grateful service) does not forgive sins; it is not perfect, nor is it redemptive. We share in Christ’s priestly anointing, but we are not Christ.”⁵⁰

Third, to share in Christ’s kingly office is “to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for eternity.” Sharing in Christ’s kingly office is often described with various language usually associated with personal sanctification,⁵¹ which would suggest that it only has to do with the outward orientations of union with Christ (according to the strict Reformed distinction between justification and sanctification). One helpful way to distinguish between the inward and the outward orientations of participation in Christ’s kingly office is to use John Murray’s distinction between “definitive sanctification” and “progressive sanctification.”⁵² Definitive sanctification involves the decisive defeat of sin accomplished on the cross such that sin has no power over a believer. Definitive sanctification is the transfer of a believer from service to sin to service to God, and this is God’s work alone. It can be identified with the inward orientation, the passive reception of the grace of Christ in his kingly office. Progressive sanctification is the work of the believer against sin, temptation,

⁵⁰ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 164.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xv.4; Ursinus, *Commentary*, 179-180; House, “Becoming,” 318; Keller, *Center Church*, 345.

⁵² John Murray, “Definitive Sanctification” and “The Agency in Definitive Sanctification,” both in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 277-293.

and evil, participating in Christ's victory by the power of the Holy Spirit. The God-ward orientation of this participation involves much of what is traditionally thought of as sanctification—fleeing sin so that lives glorify God. The human-ward orientation would involve living as humble servants, pursuing the reign of Christ in its true universality, finding no limits to the extent of his reign,⁵³ and doing this for the good of others. Believers integrate faith and work, faith and politics, faith and art, faith and culture, faith and everything, so that others would enjoy a taste of the kingdom of God.⁵⁴

This model encourages gospel-empowered ministry. Very simply, when believers engage in sanctification and in the public square as participation in Christ's kingly office, they do so with the confidence that the victory is won. The kingdom is not something they are trying to create. It is something that Christ has established in his victory. Believers only work to make it known, to participate in it, and to enjoy glimpses of it.

This theology also encourages cultural humility. Believers participate in Christ's kingly office by following Jesus, and he alone is king. So, believers are discouraged by this theology to identify Christ's kingdom with their political project, because only Jesus is king.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Christ has transformed kingship itself and our participation in it by doing what we don't expect a king to do: giving of himself completely, in humility, in weakness, and in death, in order to win the final victory

⁵³ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 149ff, 119ff, 161-168.

⁵⁴ House, "Becoming," 318; Keller, *Center Church*, 272.

⁵⁵ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 164.

for his people.⁵⁶ Believers proclaim the kingship of Jesus—the kingship of God over all. They must be humble in their understanding of it, especially because it continues to free them from our own captivities all the while.⁵⁷

A theology of missional participation in Christ's threefold office emphasizes that mission is led not by the agency of believers, but by the agency of Christ. Believers participate in *Christ's* threefold office, in union with him. Along those same lines, the emphasis on the work that Jesus Christ has done and is doing by his Spirit directs attention away from the believer and to Jesus Christ, encouraging cultural humility.

Not only does this participation theology seem to have some advantages over the imitation theology of the missional model, but it also seems better positioned to answer some of the criticisms of the missional movement. For example, Scott Aniol criticizes the position of neutrality with respect to culture that is common in the missional conversation. He argues that this position of neutrality is not well-fitted to the biblical approach to culture and can lead to too-quick accommodation.⁵⁸ A model of missional participation in Christ's threefold office can help protect against this danger with its constant dual-emphasis on God's agency and cultural humility. Those engaging missional participation will be encouraged to be humble—humble

⁵⁶ Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 149ff, 119ff, 161-168.

⁵⁷ Sherman gives historical and pastoral examples (*King, Priest, and Prophet*, 153ff, 162ff).

⁵⁸ Scott Aniol, "The Mission of Worship: An Assessment of the Missional Church Movement's Impact Upon Evangelical Worship Philosophy and Practice" (paper presented at the 65th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Baltimore, November 19-21, 2013), accessed March 8, 2016, <http://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-worship/the-mission-of-worship-an-assessment-of-the-missional-church-movements-impact-upon-evangelical-worship-philosophy-and-practice>.

not primarily with deference to their host culture but especially with submission to God's work within that culture.

Within the missional conversation, the expectation is that an effective model of ministry will encourage Christ-empowerment and cultural humility. A participation-in-Christ model can yield a more Christ-empowered theology of mission than incarnational theology because of the theme of union with Christ, focusing the believer's attention on the work of ministry and mission as work that God is doing. God's grace, God's work, and God's agency lead. In contrast, imitation theologies such as the incarnational model can leave believers discouraged at the impossible goal of imitating Christ. A theology of participation in Christ can also yield a culturally humble ministry because of the doctrine of subordination to Christ, emphasizing the prior work of God in Jesus Christ. "Ultimately, our lives are not the good news, and we ourselves are not the good news."⁵⁹ For these reasons, this thesis-project presupposes that the participation-in-Christ model is a fitting model of ministry for the missional transformation of a Reformed church like East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church.

C. Equipping and Experimenting Leadership

The 2014 focus group at East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church (EPCRC) indicated that the congregation could benefit from a missional transformation, but what should this leadership involve? Effective missional and transformational leadership will be characterized by equipping the congregation and by experimentation. This is the third presupposition underlying this thesis project. An

⁵⁹ Billings, *Union with Christ*, 160.

approach to missional transformation that involves the leadership themes of equipping and experimentation is an approach that both fits the missional church movement and is appropriate for an established Reformed congregation like EPCRC.

Missional Expectations

Equipping leadership is a theme that often arises in the missional leadership conversation. Van Gelder and Zscheile, for example, write about “participatory missional leadership.”⁶⁰ According to this model of leadership, the role of leaders is not primarily to control or directly carry out ministry—a sacerdotal model—but to cultivate every believer’s participation in Christ’s mission. This model assumes distributed ministry, in which the work of the church’s ministry to the world is not concentrated in the leadership but distributed among the congregation. This model also assumes that leaders must be present to equip the congregation. The role of leaders is not to perform the ministry as much as to equip the church for ministry. Keller puts it this way: “the whole church is in mission; every Christian is in mission... the church must... equip and send the laity into the world to minister.”⁶¹ A corollary to this model of equipped, distributed ministry is that churches can be self-propagating. Since leadership will constantly be equipping the congregation at large for ministry, eventually smaller segments of the congregation can become equipped to form the nucleus of a new congregation.

Hirsch and Catchim offer a detailed illustration of this kind of model. Their leadership system is based on a fivefold typology of ministry types. They argue that

⁶⁰ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional Church in Perspective*, 155ff.

⁶¹ Keller, *Center Church*, 259.

the church as a whole is empowered to minister according to these five ministry types. A church leader is someone who is able to empower others especially in one of those ministry types. The role of leadership, then, follows what could be called a “composite equipping” principle. The leadership of the church should be a composite of the five types of leaders according to the five types of ministry, as each type of leader equips believers to engage in that respective type of ministry.⁶² Hirsch and Catchim’s model serves as one well-structured example of the kind of equipped, distributed ministry models that are often expected in the missional church movement. In contrast to sacerdotal models in which the leadership does ministry, ministry is distributed among the entire congregation and equipped by the leaders.

The second leadership theme, leadership through experimentation, also arises frequently in the missional literature. J. R. Woodward, for example, argues that several cultural shifts in the West require a new kind of leadership in the church. There has been a shift in media from print to television to the internet, a shift in philosophy from modernity to postmodernity, a shift in science from classical systems like Newtonian physics to newer systems like Quantum physics, a shift from rural living to urban living, and a shift from Christendom to post-Christendom. Because of these shifts, the church must use leadership techniques that are less top-down, authoritative, and linear. Woodward writes of leadership through exploration, leadership not with a grand plan but with attention, and leadership not from the center but from the margins.⁶³

⁶² Hirsch and Catchim, *Permanent Revolution*, 3-26.

⁶³ J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Praxis-IVP Books, 2012), 65-76.

Alan J. Roxburgh similarly argues that missional leadership must be characterized by resisting the desire to implement large, new programs, preferring smaller experiments “around the edges.”⁶⁴ Along the same lines, Hirsch and Catchim describe apostolic leadership using the characteristics of an experimenter: innovation, thinking like a beginner, being willing to fail, and being able to improvise.⁶⁵ Neil Hudson specifically offers the practice of “This Time Tomorrow,” which is used in the project portion of this thesis-project, as an example of a “one-degree shift” with which established congregations can experiment to slowly bring new DNA into the culture of the congregation.⁶⁶ These authors are representative of those in the missional church movement who expect effective leadership to be characterized not just by equipping but by experimentation.

Equipping, Experimenting Leadership at EPCRC

Equipping and experimentation are also particularly fitting leadership themes for an established, Reformed congregation like EPCRC. The equipping leadership model is increasingly dominant in EPCRC’s denomination, the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC). Hendrinus DeMoor catalogs the 20th century debate in the CRC over the exact relationship between the Christ’s threefold office, the believer’s participation in this threefold office, and the three ecclesiastical offices of minister, elder, and deacon.⁶⁷ A common view has been that while every believer participates in the totality of Christ’s threefold office, the minister

⁶⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 176-177.

⁶⁵ Hirsch and Catchim, *Permanent Revolution*, 186ff.

⁶⁶ Neil Hudson, *Imagine Church: Releasing Whole-Life Disciples* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 97-100.

⁶⁷ DeMoor, “Equipping the Saints,” 216-224.

participates in a special way in Christ's prophetic office, the deacon in Christ's priestly office, and the elder in Christ's kingly office.⁶⁸ This one-to-one correlation between the dimensions of the threefold office of Christ and three church offices seems natural and continues to be used.⁶⁹

The correlation is not without criticism, however. Some have warned against fixing the number of offices. The church should not claim that it recognizes exactly three ecclesiastical offices precisely because Christ's office is threefold. After all, Scripture seems to allow for some flexibility in the precise number of ecclesiastical offices, and some in the Reformed tradition have defended only two biblical offices,⁷⁰ while others have defended four.⁷¹ Some have warned against the threefold office/three office correlation because it might involve restricting the minister to prophetic-type work, the deacon to priestly-type work, and the elder to kingly-type work. According to the doctrine of Christ's threefold office as articulated in Q&A 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Christ holds one office that is characterized by prophetic, priestly, and kingly dimensions, and according to the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers" articulated in Q&A 32, all believers share in the whole Christ's anointing. Likewise, one should expect to see office-bearers engaging in a range of activities that can be identified with different aspects of Christ's three-fold

⁶⁸ For example, R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ: A Scriptural Appreciation of the One Holy Scripture* (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 134.

⁶⁹ For example, "The Fellowship Theology Project," The Fellowship of Presbyterians, accessed January 2015, <http://www.pfrenewal.org>.

⁷⁰ For example, George W Knight, III, "Two Offices and Two Orders of Elders," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 23-32.

⁷¹ For example, Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, iii, 5-9.

office.⁷² This view shares some formal similarities with the missional concept of “base and phase” ministry, in which leaders have a base ministry but will be called at times to engage in another type of ministry during certain phases.⁷³ Perhaps it is this “base and phase” reality that allows different alignments between the offices of the church and Christ’s threefold office to have seemingly good theological justification.⁷⁴

Amid the debate over the number and nature of offices, a consensus has developed in the CRC that leadership is a matter of equipping the congregation for ministry. The equipping leadership model provides a way to relieve the tension between the call of the whole church to ministry and the appointment of special officers. DeMoor summarizes: God’s desire for the church is that every believer would be involved in doing the work of ministry in the world; toward this goal, Christ appoints special officers as his organs in the midst of the congregation to equip the saints for this ministry.⁷⁵ A report to Synod 2015 of the CRC, while addressing the debate about the number and nature of offices, emphasized the equipping leadership model. The threefold office of Christ, along with the continued debate about the exact number and roles of offices in the church, “points not only to three-dimensional leadership structures, but also to what all offices share—

⁷² DeMoor, “Equipping the Saints,” 216-224.

⁷³ Hirsch and Catchim, *Permanent Revolution*, 76-81.

⁷⁴ For example, Michael Joe Matossian theorizes that the that the elder and deacon minister according to Christ’s kingly office, while the minister ministers according to all three in “The Church and the Mediation of Grace: A Reformed Perspective on Ordained Ministry and the Threefold Office of Christ,” Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 2009.

⁷⁵ DeMoor, “Equipping the Saints,” 225-247.

equipment of the saints. That is the scripturally given mandate of Ephesians 4 laid upon the church.”⁷⁶

Experimentation, the second leadership theme common in the missional church movement, is also particularly appropriate for an established congregation like EPCRC. It is appropriate not because of any explicit or implicit theology but because EPCRC is an established congregation. A variety of theories of leadership suggest that experimentation will be a profitable means of transformation in such a setting. Peter L. Steinke’s systems theory approach to congregational leadership indicates the use of experimentation. He views congregations as emotional or family systems rather than as machines. One of the important components of this theory is an expectation that influence cannot be described simply as cause-and-effect but must take into account hard-to-predict loops and webs of influence.⁷⁷ Another important component is the concept of building up an immune system. Just as illness is important for the health of a biological entity, allowing it to build up its ability to fight off future disease, so in a church anxiety and conflict are essential to building up health—and a key to using conflict well is early detection.⁷⁸ In an emotional or family system, acknowledging and addressing conflict is imperative for health, and leadership through experimentation is then advised.

John S. Burns also suggests that this might be the case. He uses complexity and chaos theories to argue that one must not assume that an organization functions

⁷⁶ *Agenda for Synod 2015* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2015), 385, accessed October 27, 2016, https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/2015_agenda.pdf.

⁷⁷ Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 3-13.

⁷⁸ Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 17-21.

straightforwardly like a machine. “Linear predictions (long-range strategic plans) aimed at controlling the nature of organizational structures and outcomes over time are not possible. Functional structures develop somewhat randomly, are usually dynamic and merge from complex interactions. In other words, stuff happens!”⁷⁹ He advises that experimentation and some measure of failure are necessary to lead complex, chaotic systems.⁸⁰

Experimentation is also an important part of the adaptive leadership theory of secular theorists Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky. Leaders of organizations should use experiments to effect adaptive change, they argue, because experiments are a careful way to challenge people rather than simply meeting their expectations. Simply meeting expectations does not lead to adaptive change. Experimenting with stepping over the boundaries just a bit is a recommended way to disappoint and introduce the conflict that adaptive change requires without pushing people over the edge.⁸¹

According to each of these leadership theories, leading an organization like an established congregation through transformation requires some kind of experimentation. This suggests that the missional transformation of EPCRC should involve leadership characterized by both equipping and experimenting, just as is expected in the missional conversation. For these reasons, this thesis-project

⁷⁹ John S. Burns, “Christian Leadership on the Sea of Complexity,” in *Organizational Leadership: Foundations and Practices for Christians*, eds. John S. Burns, John R. Shoup, and Donald C. Simmons Jr. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 129.

⁸⁰ Burns, “Christian Leadership,” 131-134.

⁸¹ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 26, 277-288.

presupposes that effectively leading an established Reformed congregation through missional transformation requires leadership that is focused on equipping the congregation and leadership that utilizes experimentation.

D. Transformational Worship

These first three presuppositions suggest a fourth: that worship can facilitate missional transformation. Worship provides a natural home for both this thesis-project's presupposed theology of mission and this thesis-project's presupposed theory of leadership.

Worship provides a natural home for the missiology of presuppositions (A) and (B) because worship and mission are so similar. This similarity is at least a matter of overlap between the two. Mission can be called worship, and worship can be called mission. Among the several biblical texts that point us in this direction, Paul's appeal in Romans 12 is perhaps the most well-known. It is quoted here in Greek to reveal a grammatical feature: Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ παραστῆσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν (Romans 12:1). One of the Bible's recurring words for worship, λατρεία, is used here in a way that bridges between the broader and the narrower use of the concept "worship." In the narrower sense, worship is the corporate, weekly gathering of God's people, an activity usually associated with θυσία ("sacrifice"). This is the sense in which the word "worship" is used throughout this project. The term "worship" also has a broader sense: the all-of-life worship into

which a believer's every activity should be caught up.⁸² This is what τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν ("your bodies") indicates, especially when clarified by the adjective ζῶσαν ("living"). In this verse, the two senses of worship and the word λατρεία are all in apposition as the object of the verb.

To see how the broader, all-of-life worship in living bodies overlaps with mission, it helps to distinguish between the contexts and the audiences of worship. Mike Cospers identifies two contexts for worship:⁸³ in the narrower sense, "worship" refers to the once-a-week service which occurs in the *gathered* context; in the broader sense, "worship" refers to the all-of-life discipleship which occurs in the *scattered* context. Cospers also identifies three audiences for worship: God, the worshipers, and the world. "Mission," in the sense most often used in this project, occurs at the intersection of the scattered context and the world as audience. While this thesis-project will consistently use "worship" in the narrower sense to refer to the gathered context, "worship" has a broader sense which includes both gathered and scattered, and which, then, includes mission.

This overlap between worship and mission is the reason that some authors object to any attempts to draw a bright-line distinction between worship and mission. Simon Chan, for example, describes how worship is mission because worshipers straddle the line between kingdom and world, or move from the world, to the kingdom, and back into the world.⁸⁴ Similarly, Ruth A. Meyers describes the

⁸² Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 29.

⁸³ Mike Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 76-86.

⁸⁴ Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 82-84.

relationship between worship and mission using the image of a Möbius strip, with a graphic that places the words “worship” and “mission” on different portions of the strip. There is a kind of optical illusion: the placement of the words suggests that worship and mission are each on different sides of the strip, but a Möbius strip has only one side. The closer one investigates the two apparent sides of the strip in the image, and the closer one investigates worship and mission, the harder it is to find the line between the two.⁸⁵ Considering the overlap between worship and mission is one way of exploring their theological similarity—and one way of justifying the presupposition that worship is an appropriate venue for pursuing missional transformation.

There is, however, a more theologically substantial reason that worship provides a natural home for the theology of mission detailed above. It is not just that “worship” and “mission” can be overlapping terms. Worship and mission are also similar because both involve participation in Christ. The analysis of the first two presuppositions of this thesis-project showed how mission can be profitably understood as participation in Christ. What has been said about mission in this regard has often been said about worship: worship is participation in Christ.

Participation in Christ is a biblical model of worship. James B. Torrance points to the epistle to the Hebrews as one long exhortation to worship God the Father through participation in Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews describes Jesus Christ as the “high priest” who “offered himself unblemished to God” so that he

⁸⁵ Ruth A. Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God’s People, Going out in God’s Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 30-38.

would “cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:1-10). As Torrance says in the refrain of *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*: worship is “participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father.”⁸⁶

In fact, just as there are two types of models for mission—imitation models like the incarnational model and participation models like the model of participation in Christ’s threefold office advocated in this thesis-project—so also there are two types of models for worship, as Torrance describes. There is a “unitarian” view of worship and an incarnational-Trinitarian view of worship. In what Torrance terms the “unitarian” view (common in both liberal and evangelical Christian traditions), religion is about the believer and God, and worship is the religious service the believer performs in God’s presence. The work of Jesus Christ is at most conceived of as historical work that has been done so that the believer can now have a relationship with God and perform the service of worship. In this view, what the believer receives in worship is mostly a reminder of what God has done in Jesus Christ, and what the believer does in worship is mostly his required service to God. Torrance calls this “unitarian” because the experience of salvation and worship itself is understood mostly in “me and God” terms, without essential roles for the persons of the Trinity.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 20.

⁸⁷ Torrance, *Worship*, 20-29.

There are parallels between this and the incarnational model of mission.⁸⁸ Both mission and worship can be practiced merely as a believer's required service in response to what God has done. "Merely" is the key word. Worship and mission should indeed be understood as responses to God's grace. But in defective, imitation models of mission and worship, they are understood to be *merely* this.

In contrast, Torrance describes an incarnational-Trinitarian view of worship. In this view, a worshiper participates "through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father."⁸⁹ Worship is not just a presentation or memorial of what God has done. Worship is the gift of participating in the marvelous exchange in which Christ takes on what is ours and we receive what is his.⁹⁰

Torrance compares the understanding of the priesthood in these views. In the unitarian view, the worshiper is the priest, offering her worship before God.⁹¹ In the contrasting Trinitarian view, Jesus Christ is the high priest, who offers perfect worship and prayers before the Father. The Holy Spirit unites a worshiper to Jesus Christ so that she can participate in Christ's perfect worship before the Father.⁹² Both Chan and Robin A. Parry also write of worship directed to "the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit."⁹³ This is not a mere verbal formula. It is a Trinitarian theology that avoids viewing worship as either meritorious of God's grace on the one hand or

⁸⁸ In fact, some defend the contextualization of worship using an incarnational model. Edward Sansom Williams in "Missional Worship," D.Min. thesis, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2002, 23-25, is explicit about the use of the incarnation for both mission and worship.

⁸⁹ Torrance, *Worship*, 20, 30, 36, et al.

⁹⁰ Torrance, *Worship*, 30.

⁹¹ Torrance, *Worship*, 20.

⁹² Torrance, *Worship*, 43-67.

⁹³ Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 47; Robin A. Parry, *Worshipping Trinity: Coming Back to the Heart of Worship* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 71.

simply a response to God's grace on the other. Trinitarian worship is both a gift of God and our response.⁹⁴

F. Gerrit Immink also argues that it is the Holy Spirit who makes worship an actual meeting with God. Christian worship is a group activity and a kind of performance—a communally performed script. The question that spurs Immink's argument in *The Touch of the Sacred* is this: how is it that this "communal theater" becomes an actual interaction with God? Some in the Protestant Christian tradition, skeptical of anything that seems like a "magical" practice, might be tempted to doubt that worshipers will actually encounter God through their actions. Others might tend to view God's presence in the liturgy as something that happens through the worshipers' self-induced awareness of God in their practice (akin to Torrance's "unitarians"). Immink returns to a classic Reformation doctrine: the cause of God's presence is the work of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁵ Just as Torrance explains Trinitarian worship using the doctrine of the two-fold relationship between Father-Son and Son-humanity in the Spirit,⁹⁶ Immink explains that worshipers commune with God ("touch the sacred") in worship because there is a salvific fact—the atonement of Jesus Christ—in which the sacred touches humanity, and there is the work of the Holy Spirit who, by faith, makes worshipers share in this.⁹⁷ Chan argues the same thing.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Parry, *Worshipping Trinity*, 70-81, 129-146.

⁹⁵ F. Gerrit Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred: The Practice, Theology, and Tradition of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 1-37.

⁹⁶ Torrance, *Worship*, 31.

⁹⁷ Immink, *Touch of the Sacred*, 38-92.

⁹⁸ Chan, *Liturgical Theology* 58ff.

This Trinitarian view of worship is similar in many ways to the threefold-office view of mission described above. Both emphasize God's agency in worship and mission. In Trinitarian worship, Christ is the great high priest who offers perfect worship to the Father—worship is his work. In threefold-office mission, Christ is the one who is sent to the world—mission is his work. Both views find the believer's proper place as one of participation in Christ. A worshiper participates by the Holy Spirit in Christ's perfect worship. One who engages in mission participates by the Holy Spirit in Christ's missional anointing and work. Robbie Castleman makes this similarity between worship and mission explicit. Both are "mediated by the Son through the Spirit."⁹⁹ J. G. Davies, one of the first to write about mission and worship, also advocates explicitly for the similarity between mission and worship on this point—both are participation in Christ: "...the church's mission and worship involve participation in Christ."¹⁰⁰

In summary, the terms "worship" and "mission" not only have overlapping domains but also share a significant underlying theological reality: those who engage in both do so in participation in Christ. For these reasons, worship provides a natural home for the theology presupposed under points (A) and (B) above.

Worship also provides a natural home for the leadership practices of presupposition (C) above. This thesis-project presupposes that leadership characterized by equipping and experimentation is both missional and appropriate for the transformation of an established congregation. Worship provides a natural

⁹⁹ Robbie Castleman, *Story-Shaped Worship: Following Patterns from the Bible and History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 115.

¹⁰⁰ Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 72.

home for this kind of leadership because it involves the repeated, bodily participation of the worshipers.

In *Imagining the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith argues that human action proceeds from habits more than from conscious thought and decision-making. These habits are formed by the ways human beings relate bodily to the world around them and by the stories they imagine themselves to be a part of—stories that they learn from their social environment. Smith pleads for more attention to be paid to worship not as an information download but as a habit-teaching, immersive, story-telling exercise.¹⁰¹

Consider the words used in worship. Christian worship is filled with words—in prayers, preaching, verbal guidance, professions of faith, and at other times. Worship has transformative power, Smith writes, partly because the words used have the power to form the basic orientational metaphors that shape a worshiper's conceptual map.¹⁰² Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra describe the formative use of words in worship. Words are used to instruct, but they are also used to guide believers in expressing their faith. Words are used aesthetically, to fit the believer's situation—their place in the story, their orientation to the world and its redemption in Christ. Words are used to carry into the present the memories of the saints who have gone before.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), esp. 166.

¹⁰² Smith, *Imagining*, 110-124.

¹⁰³ Debra Rienstra and Ron Rienstra, *Worship Words: Discipling Language for Faithful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

Consider also the power of song. Christian worship is often filled with song. Smith argues that song has a special power to form a person because of the confluence of lyric and musical form.¹⁰⁴ Reggie Kidd writes autobiographically of this very power of music—both expressing the heart’s present orientation and reorienting the heart.¹⁰⁵

Words and music are the subject of major artistic disciplines. It is perhaps for this reason that they would feature prominently in a discussion of the formative power of worship. Art itself has formative power, and these two art forms are particularly formative because they are participatory art forms.¹⁰⁶ The liturgy is like a script, and the worshipers are the actors. Likewise, through worship, worshipers learn their “parts.”¹⁰⁷

Worship involves elements that form the habits of discipleship in sub-cognitive ways: through song, words, and rituals. As a repeated, weekly activity, worship lends itself to the equipping leadership approach presupposed by this thesis-project. Leaders who believe it is their role to equip believers might consider how worship has the power to do this by immersing worshipers in certain habits and a certain story.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Imagining*, 174-175.

¹⁰⁵ Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ’s Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 35-40.

¹⁰⁶ Clayton Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 98, 104-105; Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 156.

¹⁰⁷ Bruce Ellis Benson, *Liturgy as a Way of Life: Embodying the Arts in Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 134; Immink, *Touch of the Sacred*, 10ff; Michael Scott Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 14ff.

This project also presupposes that transformative missional leadership will be characterized by the use of a series of experiments designed to equip the congregation to participate in Christ's mission. Worship lends itself to equipping leadership, too. Because the liturgy is repeated every week, in some ways the same and in other ways different, leaders who hope to perform "experiments" and evaluate their effects can carefully monitor and adapt the liturgy as the effects of worship become apparent.

As described above, because worship is theologically similar to mission, a theology of missional participation in Christ's threefold office can be easily enacted in liturgy. Also, because worship involves weekly, bodily involvement of the whole congregation, liturgy seems ideally suited for equipping, experimenting leadership. Worship, likewise, provides a natural home for the missional theology presupposed under (A) and (B), and it provides a natural home for the kind of leadership presupposed under (C). All four of these presuppositions can be brought together for a definition of missionally transformative worship, but a proper synthesis and definition will build on the contributions of the missional worship literature. The next chapter will review that literature, in part for the purpose of constructing that definition.

CHAPTER 3

THE LITERATURE ON MISSIONAL WORSHIP

If worship can play a role in the missional transformation of an established Reformed congregation, what liturgies would guide this worship? What would that worship look, sound, and feel like, and how might a worship leader lead a congregation in missionally transformative worship? This chapter presents a review of a representative sample of the literature on the topic of missional worship. This review is divided into three parts, reflecting three different areas of conversation: theory, suggested worship practices, and field research.

A. The Theory of Missional Worship

The theoretical considerations addressed in the literature on missional worship are wide-ranging, drawing in many distinct theological themes. The themes are derived from theological presuppositions about what being missional and worshiping are all about. This thesis-project's review of the theory of missional worship will focus one major question especially relevant to this thesis-project: should the church use worship as an "instrument" for mission? Only after this critical theoretical question is addressed can the four presuppositions of the previous chapter can be synthesized into a definition of missionally transformative worship.

Worship as an Instrument of Mission

Should the church use worship as an "instrument" for mission? Earlier work on mission and worship seems to assume an affirmative answer to this question. In 1967, J. G. Davies was one of the first to write on missional worship in *Worship and*

Mission. His major contributions were a definition of the problem and two initial theoretical approaches to addressing that problem. Davies described how a compartmentalization of life into sacred and secular results in the separation of mission and worship. This kind of separation presents itself when worship is understood as the church's Sunday activities for God and itself, and mission is understood as the church's weekday activities for the world. Such a separation damages both worship and mission. Worship can lose its authenticity and contextualization. Mission can lose its theocentric focus.¹

In Davies' theoretical repair of this separation, there are two related but distinct approaches. The first is the similarity approach explored in the previous chapter of this thesis. This similarity approach also lies at the foundation of much of the current literature on missional worship. Davies urges readers to attend to a fundamental similarity between worship and mission: both are participation in Christ through the Holy Spirit.² Davies also advocates for a second approach, an understanding of worship as an instrument *for* mission. Davies writes, "Worship provides a source of power to enable Christians to engage in another activity outside the cultic act. Worship, it may be said, strengthens us for mission, the two being related as cause and effect."³

Written thirty years later, Sally Morgenthauer's *Worship Evangelism* represents another major episode in the history of the missional worship conversation. The *Worship Evangelism* model treats worship as an instrument for

¹ J. G. Davies, *Worship and Mission* (New York: Association Press, 1967), 9-21.

² Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 72.

³ Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 111.

mission. Morgenthaler is careful to emphasize that one of the foundational principles for worship evangelism must be that worship remain *worship*.⁴ Nevertheless, in her model worship is planned and led with the expectation that the liturgy itself can be part of the mission of evangelism. Those who do not believe and are present in worship can experience the gospel. Morgenthaler offers not only general principles to guide the planning and leading of this kind of missional worship, but also specific application to different generational cohorts.

Five Objections to Instrumentalism

Despite Davies' early recommendation that worship be understood as instrumental to mission and the following of others like Morgenthaler, more recent authors writing on missional worship have objected to instrumentalism. Among the many arguments against treating worship as instrumental to mission, there are five basic objections.

One objection is that instrumental models obliterate the unity of mission and worship. Thomas H. Schattauer argues this, and Ruth A. Meyers relies on his argument. Schattauer describes two flawed instrumentalist models. One is an "inside-and-out" indirect instrumental model in which worship and mission are understood as distinct activities, the former equipping worshipers for the latter. Another is an "outside-in" direct instrumental model in which mission is brought into worship by means of evangelistic worship like the *Worship Evangelism* model (more common in evangelical congregations) or by appeals to social action (more

⁴ Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 86-88.

common in mainline congregations).⁵ Meyers views these two dimensions of Schattauer's latter, "outside-in" model as two distinct models: "Worship as Evangelism" and "Worship as a Call to Mission."⁶ Schattauer and Meyers agree that all of these instrumental models are flawed for the same reason: they allow for a strict demarcation between worship and mission. The models fail to observe the essential unity between the two, even if their very purpose is to repair the breach as Davies proposed. Schattauer and Meyers advocate for a third model, an "inside-out" model in which "there is no separation between liturgy and mission... the relationship between worship and mission is not instrumental, either directly or indirectly, but rather the assembly for worship *is* mission."⁷

A second objection to instrumental models is that when they are put into practice, the resulting worship seems shallow. David L. Stubbs offers this objection. Stubbs sees danger when worship relates to the lives of worshipers generically or vaguely, simply encouraging worshipers to respond in gratitude to God's grace. A similar danger exists when worship is understood to relate to the rest of life as a break—a break from the real world to recharge. Worship's relationship to Christian practice must be more specific.⁸ Still, Stubbs warns that worship cannot be simply a tool for giving answers to ethical questions.⁹ Viewing worship as an instrument of mission can be dangerous because the connection between worship and mission is

⁵ Thomas H. Schattauer, "Liturgical Assembly as Locus for Mission," in *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission*, ed. Thomas H. Schattauer (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 2-3.

⁶ Meyers, Ruth A. *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's People, Going out in God's Name* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 31-34.

⁷ Schattauer, "Liturgical Assembly," 3.

⁸ David L. Stubbs, "Ending of Worship: Ethics," in *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony*, ed. Leanne VanDyk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 135-138.

⁹ Stubbs, "Ending of Worship," in VanDyk, 135, 138, 144-148.

often either vague or overly-specific in a way that undercuts imagination and deep transformation.

Werner Kemp is representative of those who offer a third kind of objection to instrumental models. Instrumental models often assume only one-way instrumentality in which worship is an instrument of mission, but mission is not an instrument of worship. Kemp argues that the worship of God is the goal, the motivation, and the means of missions. He explores the application of *Trinitarian missio dei* theology to the doctrine of worship. The church engages in missions in order that the world might worship God, as a worshipful response to God's grace, and partly through attention-getting worship.¹⁰ This objection might be particularly applicable to models like Morgenthaler's *Worship Evangelism*, which try to repair the breach between worship and mission primarily by suggesting that worship exists for the sake of mission. John Piper similarly objects, "Mission exists because worship doesn't."¹¹ Those who offer this third reason for objecting to instrumental models insist that mission must be seen as instrumental to worship just as much, if not more, than worship is seen as instrumental to mission.

In *Liturgical Theology*, Simon Chan offers a fourth kind of objection: those who adopt an instrumental model can fail to view worship as an end in itself. Chan has this concern not only about theories of worship but also about ecclesiology. God creates the church as an end in itself, Chan argues, and not as a means to an end.

¹⁰ Werner K. Kemp, "The Worship of God as the Goal, the Motivation, and the Means of Missions" (DMin thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2003).

¹¹ John Piper, "The Supremacy of God in Missions Through Worship" in *Discovering the Mission of God: Best Missional Practices for the 21st Century*, ed. Mike Barnett and Robin Martin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 68.

Similarly, God calls the church to worship for the sake of worship, fellowship with him, and not as a means to some other end.¹² Edward Sansom Williams applies the label of ‘pragmatism’ to these models. The danger, he writes, is that “worship could lose its own integrity. Worship becomes easily corrupted, subsumed under some missional banner.”¹³ Those who object to instrumental models in this way want to ensure that congregations engage in worship primarily for the sake of worship.

A fifth kind of objection is given by Christopher James Schoon. It is an objection to overly mechanical views of worship as an instrument of mission. Schoon is troubled with some authors in the missional conversation who do assume an instrumental model. He describes those who survey the landscape of churches with excellent worship but little missional engagement and nearly write off corporate worship altogether as ineffective.¹⁴ Schoon’s objection also emerges from the observation that many who object to instrumental models end up using them anyway.¹⁵ Examples of this abound. Even though Schattauer offers perhaps the most strident objection to instrumentalism—“the relationship between worship and mission is not instrumental, either directly or indirectly”¹⁶—when Meyers approvingly cites Schattauer, she goes on to propose her own instrumental models. Her descriptions of the Möbius strip and the spinning top/centrifuge models both

¹² Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 21-60.

¹³ Edward Sansom Williams, “Missional Worship” (DMin thesis, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2002), 16.

¹⁴ Christopher James Schoon, *Toward a Communally Embodied Gospel: Exploring the Role of Worship in Cultivating an Evangelistic Character among God’s People within the Missional Church Movement* (ThD thesis, Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto, 2016), 138.

¹⁵ Schoon, *Toward a Communally Embodied Gospel*, 137.

¹⁶ Schattauer, “Liturgical Assembly,” 3.

involve worship as some sort of instrument to bolster mission.¹⁷ Similarly, while pleading for the church and its worship to be understood as ends-in-themselves, Chan doesn't seem to object to all kinds of instrumental relationships between worship and the church's mission. He writes of how worship is formational and has a missiological orientation.¹⁸ Some authors in the missional worship conversation, like Al Tizon, offer instrumental descriptions unashamedly.¹⁹ Schoon identifies the problem: an "assembly-line view of worship" which expects that good missional worship will take worshipers in, do something to them, and spit out people who act in a different (i.e. missional) way. What is missing is a discussion of the Holy Spirit's transforming work.²⁰

The Deeper Connection between Mission and Worship

Objecting to instrumentalism can almost seem futile. So much of the missional worship literature relies on instrumental models, and even some of those who reject instrumentalism most vehemently, like Meyers and Chan, end up recommending their own instrumental models. Perhaps Schoon is right that consideration of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit is what is missing. Instead of asking whether worship planners and leaders should use worship as an instrument, perhaps it would help to ask what the Holy Spirit is doing in worship. Viewing worship as an instrument in a worship leader's hand is problematic for all of the reasons above. But how might God the Holy Spirit use worship as an

¹⁷ Meyers, *Missional Worship*, 34-45.

¹⁸ Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 21-60, especially 55, 78, 87.

¹⁹ Al Tizon, *Missional Preaching: Engage, Embrace, Transform* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2012), 27.

²⁰ Schoon, *Toward a Communally Embodied Gospel*, 137-142.

instrument for the missional transformation of a worshipping body? The missionally transformative work of the Holy Spirit in worship can be considered according to three themes: missional identity, missional habituation, and missional participation in Christ.²¹

Very often when the deeper connection between worship and mission is considered, the theme of identity and finding a place in the gospel story of God's mission is used.²² Missional worship happens when the Holy Spirit uses liturgy to transform worshipers according to the gospel story so that they find their place in that story as they are sent out into the world to participate in the mission of Christ.²³ Schoon writes of the importance of immersing worshipers in the story of God's mission and locating worshipers in their own contexts as participants in that narrative.²⁴ The theme of identity sheds light on how the Holy Spirit accomplishes missional transformation: a believer's identity in worship and mission is the same. The Holy Spirit uses liturgy to teach worshipers their place in the story, their identity, and this is the same identity they need to have as they continue to live out their place in the story in the rest of their lives.

²¹ After writing of the first, Stubbs points toward precisely the last two aspects—habits and participation in Christ—where he summarizes the efforts of Karl Barth, John Howard Yoder, and Alexander Schmemmann, as they each describe the relationship between worship and Christian living. See Stubbs, "Ending of Worship," in VanDyk, 143.

²² For example, Stubbs, "Ending of Worship," 137; Meyers, *Missional Worship*, 39. See also Mike Cosper, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), and Robbie F. Castleman, *Story-Shaped Worship: Following Patterns from the Bible and History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

²³ Alan Kreider and Eleanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 34, 75, 137-145; Meyers, *Missional Worship*, 12-45.

²⁴ Schoon, *Toward a Communally Embodied Gospel*, 148-152.

The transforming work of the Holy Spirit in missional worship is illuminated also by observing habits. Stubbs writes from the perspective of the worshipers: “...we are being made into Christians—our actions and lives are being linked to the life of the world, our hearts to the heart of God, our minds to the Truth. The liturgy is the embodiment of the patterns of the kingdom of God in summary fashion.”²⁵ In other words, missional worship happens when the Holy Spirit uses liturgy to transform worshipers according to missional habits—habits for all of life. Meyers offers the spinning top/centrifuge as an image for this. She pictures worship and mission as components of a spinning top: the core of the top is worship; the outsides of the top are mission. God sets the top spinning. Worshipers experience the gospel in the center of the top, which is worship. They are propelled outward to respond to God’s grace, and then they are drawn back into the center again.²⁶ In worship, the Holy Spirit equips worshipers with the habits of mission so that they practice these habits in their daily lives.

This habit-based model of the deeper relationship between worship and mission allows for James K. A. Smith’s thesis in *Imagining the Kingdom* to be applied specifically to mission. Smith describes the power of liturgy as habit-formation more than intellect-formation. Smith depends on Pierre Bourdieu’s work with the *habitus*. Human practice proceeds more from a person’s subconscious disposition or *habitus* than from acts of the intellect. A person’s *habitus* gives them a “practical sense” for making meaning of the world and living in it. This *habitus* never has to be

²⁵ Stubbs, “Ending of Worship,” 137.

²⁶ Meyers, *Missional Worship*, 38-45.

constructed or examined consciously. It is acquired from living in and with a community.²⁷ Corporate worship, Smith concludes, is the community activity of the body of Christ that forms the *habitus* of the worshiper, shaping their habits. Smith recognizes that this has something to do with mission, but he does not pursue this in detail.²⁸ Mike Cospers does:

“The goal of our gatherings should be to cultivate practices that form our church to live in the good news of the gospel... Rehearsed regularly, the gospel becomes part of our way of thinking, seeing, feeling, loving and being in the world. It’s a weekly heartbeat, gathering us in and scattering us back out to our homes and workplaces, to children’s soccer games and board meetings, to chemotherapy sessions and evenings around the dinner table.”²⁹

The habits we learn in worship, Cospers writes, are those shaped by the Bible and by the Holy Spirit. There is reciprocal influencing between weekly worship and the rest of our lives so that the habits we learn in worship are those we need to engage in mission in the world.³⁰ In this way, in missional worship the Holy Spirit transforms worshipers according to missional habits using the liturgy.

The transforming work of the Holy Spirit in worship can also be described with the theme of participation in Christ—offering a point of contact between this thesis-project’s theological presuppositions and the missional worship literature. Robbie F. Castleman explicitly connects participation in Christ in worship with participation in Christ in mission. She describes worship in Jesus Christ as a matter not just of receiving the benefits of Jesus Christ—of the Christ who makes worship

²⁷ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 75-100.

²⁸ Smith, *Imagining*, 5, 157.

²⁹ Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace*, 121, 124.

³⁰ Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace*, 149-150.

acceptable before God—but of participating in those benefits, of being transformed by them as the worshiper’s life is radically reordered toward the glory of God:

“When the church enters into worship through Christ, focused on God’s glory by the mediation of the Spirit, God’s people learn better how to center on God’s glory as the intention of the church’s mission, which is also mediated by the Son through the Spirit.”³¹

This project presupposes that participation in Christ, specifically in his threefold office, is a good way to relate the church’s mission to the mission of God in Jesus Christ. This detailed notion of participation in Christ can help fill out the theme of participation in Christ found in the missional worship literature. Michael Horton describes how Christ exercises his threefold office in the worship service:

“As our prophet, he pronounces his judgment and announces his salvation through his ambassadors. As our priest, he stands between us and the just wrath that divine holiness entails in relation to rebels like us. Beyond mediating, he, the judge, assumes our judgment. As risen king, he has conquered sin and death for us and now rules in his church so that no alien ruler can conquer us.”³²

In worship, the Holy Spirit brings worshipers into union with this Christ, this prophet, priest, and king. In so doing, the Holy Spirit equips worshipers for their own missional participation in this threefold office.³³

Mark Labberton offers an illustration of what might be considered mission-equipping worship in union with the Christ the King. Labberton focuses on how

³¹ Castleman, *Story-Shaped Worship*, 115.

³² Michael Scott Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2002), 30.

³³ Davies comes close to describing this where he describes mission as involving declaring (kerygma), living (koinonia), and demonstrating (diakonia) (Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 22-36). The relationship between those three aspects of the church’s life and the three-fold office of Christ would bring this project to far afield.

challenging worship should be—specifically challenging the powers of the world, since the Christ who is worshiped is the one who rules over all powers and authorities. Worship should challenge worshipers by waking them up to the life-changing reality that they are in fellowship with the Father, because of the Son, through the Holy Spirit in their neighborhood. This should transform their lives so that they live to love God and neighbor.³⁴ Worship puts worshipers in communion with Jesus Christ, King of Kings, who is the best response to the abuses of power of this world. This reality transcends all the parts of the liturgy. As a result, worshipers are empowered to confront injustice in the world.³⁵ In this way, worship in union with Christ the King equips worshipers to engage in mission in union with Christ the King. The themes of participation in Christ prophet and priestly offices could yield similar descriptions. Participation in Christ, specifically in Christ as prophet, priest, and king, is a third theme illuminating missional worship, in which the Holy Spirit uses the liturgy to transform worshipers for mission.

A Definition of Missionally Transformative Worship

After attending to the various objections to instrumentalism and the various approaches to understanding how the Holy Spirit uses liturgy to transform worshipers for mission, it is possible to synthesize a definition of missionally transformative worship. The literature advises against constructing a definition of missional worship in way that obscures the unity of mission and worship, that is simplistic, that is unidirectional, that treats worship only as means to an end, or that

³⁴ Mark Labberton, *The Dangerous Act of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 87, 33, 94.

³⁵ Labberton, *Dangerous Act*, 109-131.

ignores the role of the Holy Spirit. Missionally transformative worship can be defined as: worship in which the Holy Spirit leads worshipers into greater missional activity through liturgies designed to form worshipers according to identity and habits for participation in Christ's threefold office with respect to the world.

A key feature of this thesis-project's understanding of mission is that it is about the gospel and the world. Believers engage in missional activity, according to this thesis-project's second presupposition, by participating in the work of Christ in his three-fold office with an outward orientation toward the world. Missional activity is defined by the coming-together of those two things—the work of Christ and the world. Those two things characterize all of the themes in the church ministry plane of the missional church movement as described in this thesis-project's first chapter: sending, humble incarnation, contextualization, and kingdom engagement. These two components—Christ and the world—also lead to the two major expectations the missional church movement has about theologies of the relationship between Christ's mission and the church's mission (as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis-project): Christ-empowerment relates to the work of Christ and cultural humility relates to the outward orientation toward the world.

In worship, these two can come together as well. András Lovas describes the connection well: "the church's liturgy should be shaped by the gospel/biblical narrative. By this, I mean that the goal of liturgy is to immerse God's people in God's gospel story in such a way that this people will be able to live out the mission of

Jesus in their everyday lives.”³⁶ Liturgy that neglects either of these—either participation in the gospel narrative or participation in the world—is not, properly speaking, missional liturgy. Any definition of missional worship needs to include reference both to Christ’s work and to the context of world in which the worshipers find themselves. Missional worship uses liturgy designed to form worshipers according to identity and habits for participation in Christ’s threefold office with respect to the world. When the Holy Spirit uses this liturgy to lead worshipers into greater missional practice, this missional worship is missionally transformative worship.

B. The Practice of Missional Worship

The second section of this literature review summarizes suggestions for missional liturgy. The descriptions of worship practices in the literature are numerous and varied, and not all of the practices fully qualify as missionally transformative worship practices according to the definition arrived at above. In fact, three criteria will be applied to identify proper missional liturgies for the purposes of this project.

First, missional liturgies are those specifically designed for the formation of believing worshipers. If missional worship is about the formation of worshipers for mission in the rest of their lives, then missional liturgy will be designed especially for those who will engage in mission. In contrast, the missional worship literature sometimes recommends attractional, seeker sensitive, and evangelistic liturgical

³⁶ András Lovas, “Mission-Shaped Liturgy,” *International Review of Mission* 95, nos. 378/379 (July/October 2006): 355.

practices. In *Missional Worship: Increasing Attendance and Expanding the Boundaries of Your Church*, Cathy Townley describes a number of worship practices along these lines. Townley exhorts worship leaders to make sure that everything about worship is designed to help guests feel welcome, from the language used, to the directional signs in the building, to the introductions and explanations that help those unfamiliar with the service understand what is happening.³⁷ The goal is church growth, as stated even in the subtitle: “Increasing Attendance and Expanding the Boundaries of Your Church.” These worship practices may have some formative impact on worshipers, but they are identified as “missional” primarily because they are designed for church growth rather than focusing on the formation of the believing, worshiping community. According to the definition in use for this project, this is not truly missional liturgy. Missional worship involves liturgy designed specifically for the formation of those who will be engaging in mission.

Second, missional liturgies are those that make reference to *both* of the component themes of mission—Christ and the world. The missional worship literature sometimes includes suggested practices that only explicitly involve the first—incorporation into the gospel story of God’s work in Jesus Christ. The liturgies don’t include a directly missional aspect, an awareness of the world; missional results are a hoped-for indirect byproduct. For example, following the “identity” theme described above, Kreider and Kreider describe how God “restories” his people in worship so that they can locate themselves in God’s narrative. They then

³⁷ Cathy Townley, *Missional Worship: Increasing Attendance and Expanding the Boundaries of your Church* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2011), 107-115.

describe several worship practices aimed directly at heightening the worshipers' awareness of that story: singing narrative worship songs, free Eucharistic prayers based on a Trinitarian outline, Scripture reading using multiple voices, and following the liturgical calendar.³⁸ Clayton J. Schmit offers other suggestions in this category, often focusing on practices that are designed to minimize dissonance between the form and content of worship or eliminate the sense that worshipers are observers rather than participants—again to enhance worshipers' awareness of the story. He describes the significance of placing the baptismal font or pool at the entrance to or in the center of the worship space as well as the importance of using copious amounts of water.³⁹ He also reminds worship leaders to remember that calls to worship are spoken to the worshipers as words from God, and he advises against including all three of a greeting, an invocation, and a call to worship, to avoid unwieldy liturgy.⁴⁰ The purpose of all of these is to remove barriers and draw worshipers into the story being told in the liturgy.

Implementing some of these worship practices may be an excellent idea. In all likelihood, the Holy Spirit might use them for missional transformation. However, they are only indirectly targeted at missional transformation. Their direct goal is to facilitate awareness of and to incorporate worshipers into the story of the gospel. As an indirect by-product of that heightened awareness of the story, it is hoped that worshipers will be more engaged in the mission of God as they find themselves in

³⁸ Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission*, 59-75.

³⁹ Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 168.

⁴⁰ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 170.

the world. The problem for this review is that including every worship practice designed to make worship more narratively engaging would open the door to include just about anything. Liturgies that are properly missional will aim explicitly and directly at the Holy Spirit's formation of worshipers according to both the gospel and the world.

Finally, this review of missional liturgies will focus especially on new worship practices. Much of the missional worship literature contains descriptions of the missiology of standard features of Christian worship. Davies, for example, describes how the use of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper is related to mission inasmuch as those elements bring the natural world and the proceeds of industry into worship.⁴¹ This is no doubt an interesting and important point of contact between mission and worship. However, most congregations will find themselves using bread and wine (or juice) regardless of the missional dimensions. Perhaps Davies' observation would imply implementing some new practice—some language directing attention to God's use of the agriculture and food industries. But without some suggested new practice like this, Davies' description of the missional dimension of the celebration of the Lord's Supper is just that—a description of how some worship practices are already missional. The focus of this thesis-project is not on what a congregation is already doing. The focus is on change, on transformation. What might be done in worship in an established congregation to remove barriers to and facilitate a missional transformation?

⁴¹ Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 100.

This thesis-project is situated in a specific context—East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church (EPCRC) in 2016. Some of the missional worship literature contains suggestions that many congregations could benefit from, but those practices are already long-standing parts of EPCRC's liturgy. For example, Meyers recommends that congregations practice corporate confession and assurance. Worshipers who are led through a corporate liturgy of reconciliation with God can be expected to seek reconciliation in the world.⁴² While a few more minor points of Meyers' description of confession and assurance differ from current practice at EPCRC (and will be noted below), this component of the liturgy has long been a part of worship and would not count as a suggestion *for EPCRC*, even if it would for many congregations (even those in the same denomination). The focus of this thesis-project is not missional worship in general but missionally transformative worship. This review of missional liturgies is especially focused on practices that are in some way new for EPCRC and thereby might play a role in missional transformation.

The following is a review of worship practices suggested in the literature that will be candidates for testing at EPCRC. The descriptions of these practices follow, and they serve, in a way, as the primary texts for this project.

Gathering

The gathering liturgy can form worshipers for mission through the theme of welcoming and by emphasizing the missional identity of the worshipers. Worshipers are gathered from their variety of contexts in the world and marked by their gathering as people who have been set apart by the gospel. Meyers describes a

⁴² Meyers, *Missional Worship*, 128-149.

missional beginning of worship as a matter of returning from worshipful mission in the world to worshipful mission on Sunday morning. As a suggestion, Meyers describes the “collect,” a prayer that collects the prayers of the diverse group that gathers from their various places of service.⁴³ The prayer that Meyers describes is generic and formulaic. However, an opening prayer which refers to the variety of fields of service represented by the worshipers could be a good way to characterize worship is a returning from mission. Schoon offers some other suggestions: the worship leader can mention the diversity of places worshipers have come from as they are welcomed, and the worship leader can name other churches that are gathering for worship.⁴⁴ These practices could encourage worshipers to bring into worship their unique callings to participate in Christ’s mission to the world—to understand their identity as people who are sent out in the mission of God.

Confession and Assurance

The confession and assurance liturgy can be missional inasmuch as it brings the assurance of God’s grace in Jesus Christ into conversation with confessions and laments of real people in the world from which the worshipers have come. The Holy Spirit can use confession and assurance to form worshipers as people who yearn for the grace of God in the threefold office of Christ to heal their world’s sins and sorrows. The practice of confession also trains worshipers to exhibit gospel humility and to love reconciliation—habits they will need to engage effectively in the mission

⁴³ Meyers, *Missional Worship*, 46-73.

⁴⁴ Christopher James Schoon, “Missional Worship for Missional Living” (Christian Reformed Church webinar, May 7, 2014), accessed April 20, 2016, <http://network.crcna.org/sites/default/files/documents/MissionalWorshipSlidesHandout.pdf>.

of God. Toward these ends, Schmit suggests that prayers of confession should take local and global concerns into account.⁴⁵ Other authors offer descriptions that give particular expression to this. Davies and Meyers each describe prayers of confession which broaden outside the individuals seated in the pew: Davies suggests prayers confessing the world's sins, and Meyers suggests remembering those who need forgiveness and reconciliation inside the church. Davies also recommends the practice of passing the peace as way of being oriented toward the mission of forgiveness for others.⁴⁶

Intercessory Prayer

Called the "Congregational Prayer" at EPCRC, a major intercessory prayer can be a missional liturgy inasmuch as the worshipers bring intercessions on behalf of others to the God of grace. Like the confession and assurance, through this prayer the Holy Spirit can form worshipers to approach the joys and sorrows of the world with an awareness of God's approach to those joys and sorrows in the threefold office of Christ. A common suggestion in the missional worship literature is to broaden the petitions to include intercessions not just for the sick in the congregation and immediate friends and family (the traditional focus of this prayer, at least at EPCRC) but also for the needs of the neighborhood and the world.⁴⁷ Neil Hudson suggests using projection equipment to display the front pages of

⁴⁵ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 170.

⁴⁶ Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 127-130; Ruth A. Meyers, "Missional Church, Missional Liturgy," *Theology Today* 67, no. 1 (April 2010): 49.

⁴⁷ For example, Gordon W. Lathrop, "Liturgy and Mission in the North American Context," in Schattauer, *Inside Out*, 208-210; Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 186-187; Scott W. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 299; James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 193-194.

newspapers amid prayer requests.⁴⁸ Davies suggests that intercessory prayer for the world be connected specifically to the theology of participation in Christ's priestly office—we intercede for the world because we participate in Christ who is the Intercessor.⁴⁹ Meyers suggests that the prayer follow the sermon, both in theme and in the order of the service, so that the prayer can draw upon the story of God's mission. When we pray thematic prayers of intercession for the world after the sermon, "...we join God's mission of reconciling love for the world."⁵⁰

Offering

The offering liturgy can allow for worshipers to participate in Christ's threefold office toward the world by connecting two realities: first, as they give from what God has given them, they look to the providence of God; second, as they give to the causes highlighted by the offering, they look to the needs of the world. As Smith writes about the offering, "the kingdom is concerned with economics."⁵¹ Authors writing about missional worship practices suggest that words used at the time of the offering can draw attention to worshipers' participation in God's work in the world. Schoon describes speaking about how God is involved in the offering cause,⁵² and Gordon W. Lathrop suggests framing the offering not as a participation in good works or an answer to prayer but as an embodied act of prayer.⁵³ In other words, the worship leader can speak about the offering as a practiced yearning for the work

⁴⁸ Neil Hudson, *Imagine Church: Releasing Whole-Life Disciples* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 103.

⁴⁹ Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 114-125.

⁵⁰ Meyers, *Missional Worship*, 116.

⁵¹ Smith, *Desiring*, 204.

⁵² Schoon, "Missional Worship."

⁵³ Lathrop, "Liturgy and Mission", 210.

of God in the threefold office of Christ. The offering liturgy can be aimed at during-the-week action by placing it near the end of the service,⁵⁴ by speaking about it as a call to during-the-week worship,⁵⁵ and by highlighting service opportunities.⁵⁶

Sermon

Tizon offers an entire volume on missional preaching. He includes suggestions for aiming preaching at common missional themes, like contextualization, alternative community, holistic transformation, and justice. To summarize the many suggestions for missional preaching found throughout *Missional Preaching: Engage, Embrace, Transform* and in other texts would significantly broaden this review. For the sake of brevity, this project will focus on liturgical elements other than the sermon.

Baptism

Baptism is about identity, and as such it can be missional when the Holy Spirit uses it to confirm the worshipers in their missional identity as people who participate in the threefold mission of Christ with respect to the world. In many traditions, baptisms contain promises about conduct, renunciations,⁵⁷ and prayers for those who are taking on the baptismal identity.⁵⁸ In addition to this, Schoon advises that both baptism and the Lord's Supper include commissioning language.⁵⁹ This language could even, according to the presuppositions of this thesis-project, explicitly reference the threefold office of Christ. Some authors urge that at a

⁵⁴ Meyers, *Missional Worship*, 186.

⁵⁵ Cospers, *Rhythms*, 142.

⁵⁶ Schoon, "Missional Worship."

⁵⁷ Smith, *Desiring*, 183-190.

⁵⁸ Lathrop, "Liturgy and Mission," 208.

⁵⁹ Schoon, "Missional Worship."

baptism, all the baptized should be challenged to consider their missional call, and not just the person being baptized.⁶⁰

Holy Communion

The celebration of the Lord's Supper involves a congregation united together as they share in reconciliation with their God using the ordinary objects of a table, a plate, a chalice, bread, and wine. With baptism, the Lord's Supper is one of the most physical and tangible ways that worshipers encounter the grace of God. This connection between the supernatural grace of forgiveness and reconciliation and the ordinary people and objects provides a natural locus for missional transformation. Lathrop suggests that the Supper be celebrated as a real meal and with extra food that can be distributed to the hungry after the service.⁶¹ This aims at missional formation by directing the attention of communicants from the grace of God in Jesus Christ, which they receive at the table, to the world that needs to be fed by God, especially fed in Jesus Christ, and needs to be at that table, too. Other suggestions include emphasizing the themes of reconciliation and unity by practicing radical inclusion at that table.⁶²

Sending

The conclusion of the liturgy can contain a wide variety of components, and each of them can be missional in a way similar to the gathering. Both the gathering and the sending are liminal points between the world into which the worshipers are

⁶⁰ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 363.

⁶¹ Lathrop, "Liturgy and Mission," 209.

⁶² Mark P. Bangert, "Holy Communion: Taste and See," in Schattauer, *Inside Out*, 75-83.

sent and the place where the Holy Spirit especially strengthens them for that mission, forming them according to a missional identity and habits in participation in Christ. The Holy Spirit can use the sending liturgy for missional transformation especially when the liturgy emphasizes the transition between gathered worship and scattered worship, between missional worship and worshipful mission. Schmit suggests that the ending of the worship service is often unfortunately neglected by academics and worship planners, while simultaneously being perhaps the best connection point between worship and mission.⁶³ Davies suggests that announcements can be made at the end of the service as a way of orienting the congregation to opportunities for missional participation.⁶⁴ The worship leader can also name the tasks that worshipers are sent out to do as a kind of commissioning. Townley would include a summons to invite a friend to worship next time,⁶⁵ a suggestion which might seem to be focused not on worshipers but on visitors. However, this suggestion is missional. It is directly addressed to worshipers with the intent of forming them for participation in Christ's mission. Christ invites, gathers, and welcomes the world to worship him, and worshipers should participate in this. Schoon suggests that worship leaders ask worshipers to say the charge to the person next to them.⁶⁶ Schmit suggests commissioning distinct individuals in worship. He describes having them make a vow, receive a blessing, and be prayed for at the end of the worship service.⁶⁷ Hudson similarly describes a three- to four-

⁶³ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 26-27, 155.

⁶⁴ Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 139-140. See also Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 159-160.

⁶⁵ Townley, *Missional Worship*, 113.

⁶⁶ Schoon, "Missional Worship."

⁶⁷ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 158-159.

minute interview of someone who will be engaging in their ordinary work. The person would be asked:

1. What will you be doing this time tomorrow?
2. What opportunities or challenges will you face?
3. How can we pray for you?

The commissioning would be concluded with prayer for that person. He calls the practice “This Time Tomorrow” and suggests follow-up testimonies of those who were blessed to be used by God after being commissioned in this way.⁶⁸

Other Aspects of Worship

The music, décor, and language used in worship can also equip worshipers to participate in Christ’s mission in worship and out. Julius Fabregas suggests looking for songs that speak not only of God’s grace in and for us but also of God’s grace to the world through us.⁶⁹ Including flags from a variety of countries, global music and litanies,⁷⁰ and symbols from the local community,⁷¹ and even hosting worship in the streets⁷² can help to orient worshipers to the global and local context as they worship. Hudson suggests placing photos of people at their workplaces and a mirror on the missionary board.⁷³

The above descriptions of missional liturgies are only a small subset of those found in literature on missional worship. However, those summarized above are distinct practices that are aimed at believing worshipers and at connecting their

⁶⁸ Hudson, *Imagine Church*, 100-102.

⁶⁹ Julius Fabregas, “What is Missional Worship?”, Victory Church (Manila, Philippines), November 12, 2015, accessed April 22, 2016, <http://victory.org.ph/article/what-is-missional-worship/>.

⁷⁰ Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 299.

⁷¹ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 163.

⁷² Lois Y. Barrett, ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 108.

⁷³ Hudson, *Imagine Church*, 99-103.

participation in Christ with their mission to the world. These liturgies are the type that might facilitate missional transformation as the Holy Spirit uses worship to lead a congregation, specifically EPCRC, into greater missional activity. This thesis-project will draw from these liturgical suggestions.

C. Prior Field Research

What might a worship leader who implements some of these liturgical practices expect? Have other congregations done these things and found them effective in facilitating missional transformation? Questions like these have rarely been examined in published field research, leaving a major opportunity for projects like this one.

Some researchers have designed and implemented missional worship practices but have failed to report on any data collected that might indicate the effectiveness of these practices. For example, Daniel Collison, in “Toward a Theology and Practice of Missional Worship,” describes the current cultural location of worship in evangelical churches and some key theological and biblical foundations for missional worship. Collison offers specific suggestions for missional worship, suggestions which are similar to those found elsewhere in the literature, but he does not report on the use of any instrument to test their effectiveness.⁷⁴

Other researchers have collected data as part of their missional worship projects, but the data cannot be used to measure the effectiveness of various practices. For example, Jeffrey Scott Meeks designed and implemented some

⁷⁴ Daniel Collison, “Toward a Theology and Practice of Missional Worship” (DMin thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009).

missional worship practices, as he describes in “Fostering a Culture of Response as a Worshiping Community at University Place Presbyterian Church, University Place, Washington.” These worship practices included songs and commissioning litanies. Only a pre-project survey was done, so no data exists to measure the outcome of implementing these liturgical practices.⁷⁵

Edward Sansom Williams, in “Missional Worship,”⁷⁶ offers a vision for missional worship and describes the post-Christendom context. He then applies those insights to specific liturgical acts, proposing a kind of missional liturgy. Many of his suggested worship practices are echoed elsewhere in the missional worship literature. Williams does briefly report that qualitative data was collected via a focus group. However, this data was collected only in preparation for his proposed missional liturgy. It therefore cannot be used to evaluate the post-implementation effectiveness of any liturgical practices. Even if it could be used for that purpose, Williams offers almost nothing in the way of description, analysis, or interpretation of the data he did collect.

Christopher Paul Benjamin collected post-project data, but the data cannot be used to measure the effectiveness of his project at the congregational level. In “Developing Missional Ecclesiology through Worship at the Lake Jackson Church of Christ,” he focuses on training worship planners and leaders in a theology of missional worship and then evaluating the worship services they were involved in.

⁷⁵ Jeffrey Scott Meeks, “Fostering a Culture of Response as a Worshiping Community at University Place Presbyterian Church, University Place, Washington” (DMin thesis, Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies, 2008).

⁷⁶ Williams, “Missional Worship.”

His research subjects were the worship leaders, rather than the whole congregation.⁷⁷ Anecdotal evidence suggested an impact on the broader congregation,⁷⁸ but validating the conclusion that educating worship leaders and planners had an impact on the congregation as a whole would require additional testing.

Robert M. Stuberg's thesis is useful background for this thesis-project. In "Fostering Corporate Eucharistic Piety as Locus for Mission at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Helena, Montana," he reports on data collected to test the missional effectiveness of worship practices. As part of his research, he made changes to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Stuberg added several liturgical elements that are common in the worship of many churches but not at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church. The elements were only indirectly aimed at mission: a "passing of the peace" near the beginning of the meal, a prayer of thanksgiving whose content varied but always included invoking the Holy Spirit, a *sursum corda*, and a congregational response—"Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again."⁷⁹ When he convened a focus group to measure the impact these changes might have on various aspects of congregational life, he found "...no indication from the focus group that the liturgical changes would foster an increased focus on the mission of the church."⁸⁰ He notes that a one-time change to the liturgy followed

⁷⁷ Christopher Paul Benjamin, "Developing Missional Ecclesiology through Worship at the Lake Jackson Church of Christ" (DMin thesis, Abilene Christian University, 2004), 58.

⁷⁸ Benjamin, "Developing Missional Ecclesiology," 115.

⁷⁹ Robert M. Stuberg, "Fostering Corporate Eucharistic Piety as Locus for Mission at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Helena Montana" (Doctor of Worship Studies thesis, Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies, 2006), 64-65.

⁸⁰ Stuberg, "Fostering Corporate Eucharistic Piety," 98.

immediately by a single focus group session likely could not have yielded enough data to detect changes in piety or missional participation.⁸¹

Schoon does not report in detail on any field research done during the writing of “Toward a Communally Embodied Gospel: Exploring the Role of Worship in Cultivating an Evangelistic Character among God’s People within the Missional Church Movement.” However, he does offer some considerations regarding field research that are relevant for this project. As a result of this conviction that worship should not be construed as an assembly line to produce missional Christians, Schoon advises a focus on long-term faithfulness rather than numbers in evaluating certain missional worship practices.⁸² Missional worship should be tested, that is, not by seeking quantitative data that would indicate the profitability of replicating particular worship practices, but rather by seeking qualitative data that can illustrate how the Holy Spirit was at work in one particular place. Schoon also advises that missional worship be placed in the context of missional discipleship. A worship leader should not expect missional worship to have results without discipleship.⁸³ He presents an annotated liturgy from his own congregation. The discussion includes descriptions of how various aspects of the liturgy interact with the themes that missional worship should include. Unfortunately, Schoon does not use any particular instrument to collect qualitative, narrative data.

There seems to be a major gap in the research on missional worship. Rarely are specific worship practices evaluated for how well they might facilitate a

⁸¹ Stuberg, “Fostering Corporate Eucharistic Piety,” 98.

⁸² Schoon, *Toward a Communally Embodied Gospel*, 175.

⁸³ Schoon, *Toward a Communally Embodied Gospel*, 189ff.

missional transformation. This thesis-project can build on Stuberg's by using directly missional practices and testing them after they have been in place for a longer period of time. This thesis project can also build on Schoon's by focusing on qualitative, narrative data, by avoiding the temptation to generalize the results, and by considering any data in the context of concurrent discipleship practices.

Summary of the Literature Review

What is missionally transformative worship? The literature on this question advises against assuming that there will be some instrumental or mechanistic relationship between liturgy and the production of missional activity or its agents. Missionally transformative worship happens when the Holy Spirit forms worshipers according to identity and habits for participation in Christ's threefold office with respect to the world using liturgies designed for this purpose. This project will focus on the practices reviewed above—practices that are aimed at believing worshipers, that are designed to facilitate the Holy Spirit's formation of worshipers' missional identity, habits, and participation in Christ with an explicit view toward the world into which they are sent, and that would be different enough to catalyze change in an established congregational like EPCRC. A review of field research done on missional worship shows a need for the collection of qualitative, narrative data that will indicate whether these missional worship practices can facilitate missional transformation.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

Can missional liturgy play a role in the missional transformation of a traditional, Reformed congregation like East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church (EPCRC)? This thesis-project has investigated this question through an analysis of four key foundational presuppositions and a review of literature on missional worship. It seems that if EPCRC implemented liturgies designed to equip worshipers for missional participation in Christ's threefold office, and if it pleased the Holy Spirit to use these liturgies, worshipers might experience some missional transformation. This chapter describes three liturgical experiments that tested this thesis. Each experiment included the implementation of a specific liturgy and the evaluation of that liturgy's impact on missional participation in Christ's threefold office.

Implementation of Three Liturgical Practices

The previous chapter catalogued various suggestions for missional worship practices: The artistry of the worship space and the objects in it, the words that are spoken, and the music in which all the worshipers participate each can be designed for missional formation. The gathering liturgy can be tailored to emphasize the diversity of places and areas of service from which worshipers are being gathered. The confession and assurance liturgy can include prayers of confession that look beyond the individual to the broader world. Sermons can aim at missional themes like enculturation, alternative community, holistic transformation, and justice. Baptism and the Lord's Supper can be framed to emphasize the missional identity

and practices of the worshipers. Among these, however, the sending liturgy might be particularly appropriate for a test of missional liturgies.

Clayton J. Schmit writes about the potential of the sending liturgy. It is often a neglected moment in worship planning and leadership and simultaneously perhaps the most important moment for missional worship.¹ David L. Stubbs similarly suggests that to measure how well worship connects to the rest of worshipers' lives, one ought to examine how those worshipers end their worship.² At the end of worship, just as at the beginning, worshipers find themselves at the threshold between gathered and scattered, between missional worship and worshipful mission. The closing moments of the liturgy are not just the ending of the missional worship of the gathered assembly, but also the beginning of their missional worship scattered in the world. Can this liturgical bridge not only give worshipers the sense that the liturgy is finished, but even more send them out in the power of the Triune God to continue that worship?

At EPCRC, themes of mission are present to some extent in the sending liturgy. Once a month the congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper following the sermon. The themes of the sermon and the rest of worship are often incorporated into the communion liturgy. Anecdotally, worshipers express to the pastor their appreciation for worship more often on communion Sundays. On other Sundays, worship ends about five minutes after the sermon. When the sermon is finished, the

¹ Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 43-55; see also James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 5.

² David L. Stubbs, "Ending of Worship: Ethics," in *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony*, ed. Leanne VanDyk (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans), 134.

pastor prays a very brief applicatory prayer. The congregation stands to sing a hymn (which usually fits with the themes of the sermon). The pastor then charges the worshipers to go out, receiving the gospel as proclaimed and living according to it. For example, after a sermon on the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer ("Forgive us as we forgive others."), the congregation was charged to "Go out knowing in faith that your sins, your debts to God, are forgiven in Jesus Christ, and forgiving those who owe you as a sign of God's forgiveness." The charge is immediately followed by a benediction and a doxology.

The literature on missional worship reviewed in the previous chapter contains a number of suggestions for making the ending of worship more missional. Three of these seem particularly promising for EPCRC:

1. The intercessory prayer can be prayed during the sending liturgy to maximize its formative impact on mission. The prayer should apply the themes of the sermon to the concerns of the world that the worshipers will encounter as they are sent out.
2. The offering can be placed at the end of worship to emphasize its formative impact on mission. It should be introduced as an extension of prayer and an exercise in mission.
3. Commissioning ordinary people to their everyday tasks can emphasize the sending of the whole church and help people consider their own weekday contexts as missional opportunities.

These three worship practices were introduced and evaluated in worship at EPCRC as liturgical "experiments" in missional transformation.

Missional Prayers

The first liturgical experiment involved moving the intercessory prayer, called the “congregational prayer” at EPCRC, from the confession and assurance liturgy (as an element of giving thanks after assurance) to the sending liturgy. The petitions of the prayer were carefully aligned with the theme of the sermon. In accordance with the presuppositions of this project, this was done with particular attention to Christ’s mission in his threefold office. The petitions intentionally included a wide variety of concerns—personal, local, and global—as a way of focusing the congregation’s attention simultaneously on the work of Jesus Christ and the world into which they are sent. This arrangement was maintained for three Sundays in March, 2016.

Concluding the service with an intercessory prayer is not an entirely new practice at EPCRC. When the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, in lieu of a longer congregational prayer earlier in the service, the prayer following communion includes a few intercessions especially for the needs of the church community. Also, for a 2014 sermon series on the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, the congregational prayer was included in the sending liturgy as a way of applying the themes of the sermons.

This experiment began on March 13, 2016. The sermon text was John 19:1-15, in which Jesus is sentenced by Pontius Pilate. The sermon especially focused on verse 11, explaining that while Pontius Pilate misused the gift of legal authority that God had given him, Jesus’ accusers were guilty of a “greater sin,” as Jesus said, because they rejected the greatest gift God has given: Jesus as the Christ. “Jesus

Christ is the greatest gift” was the theme of the sermon. The theme connected with all three dimensions of Christ’s threefold office. As prophet, priest, and king, Christ is the greatest gift, the one that God has sent to the world.

The prayer applied that theme to the world, first with three petitions for the worshipers themselves: as we speak, give us the words to speak of Christ, the Word made flesh; as we love, give us a love that comes from Christ, the one who died; as we strive for what is right, give us a strength that comes from Christ, the one who is risen. The prayer then included a number of varied petitions for the world: for those who are longing to hear the truth, may they hear Christ; for those who are longing to have their needs met, may they meet Christ; for those who need forgiveness, may they be forgiven by Christ; for those who need deliverance, may they be delivered from their sins, from their shame, from a life whose conclusion is death by the death and resurrection of Christ; and for those who need hope, may they be given a hope that is everlasting in Jesus Christ. With each of these petitions, particular instances were mentioned, such as, “We pray for those whose lives have been upended by natural events, like those whose houses have been flooded in Louisiana.” In this way, the prayer applied the preeminence of Christ as God’s greatest gift to the world in his threefold office to the needs of the congregation and the world.

On March 20, 2016, Palm Sunday, the theme of the service was the communion of the saints: by Christ’s death, he creates one people out of the many. The text was John 19:18-27, particularly verses 26 and 27 in which Jesus says to Mary and John, “Here is your son... Here is your mother.” This theme connects especially with Christ in his priestly office, one who reconciles sinners to God

through his sacrifice and thereby unites people with one another before God.

Believers participate missionally in Christ's priestly work in this respect when they go out into the world to pursue reconciliation.

The prayer did not follow the sermon immediately. Between the sermon and the prayer was a call to personal examination in preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Supper later in Holy Week. The congregation recited the Apostles' Creed, and then prayed. The congregational prayer began with thanksgiving and petitions specifically relating to the upcoming celebration of the Lord's Supper and with reference to the forgiving and reconciling work of Jesus Christ as Great High Priest. The prayer then focused on the need for reconciliation and forgiveness in the worshipers' lives and world. The congregation prayed that God would help them remember those who feel excluded or marginalized, especially when they are overlooked as people are celebrating others and their accomplishments. They prayed that they would comfort those who need comfort, and some specific names were mentioned. The congregation prayed for those suffering because of discrimination, racism, and persecution, and for a nation and families suffering because of bitter internal political division during an election year.

On March 27, 2016, Easter Sunday, the theme of the service was the Resurrection, as told in John 20:1-9. The sermon considered Peter and John visiting the tomb, and the refrain was: "Jesus is done with death." The congregation was directed to notice especially John's response of faith when he saw the grave clothes lying neatly in the tomb. The theme "Jesus is done with death" connects with the

completed kingly and priestly work of Christ, but the sermon focused especially on Jesus Christ as the prophet who reveals this hopeful truth.

This theme led the missional congregational prayer. In the prayer, the congregation prayed for other churches proclaiming the Resurrection that day. The prayer included petitions for the worshipers—that they would live life according to a firm belief that Jesus is done with death. The prayer also included petitions for the world, praying that those who suffered shame, guilt, and isolation because of their sin would be assured by the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that their forgiveness was complete. They prayed that those who felt trapped in hopelessness—because of violence and terrorism in places like Brussels, Belgium—would be assured by the message that Jesus Christ had already gone through terror, agony, and even death to bring life.

Missional Offering

The second liturgical experiment began in April after a Sunday with a typical liturgy and a guest preacher. The congregational prayer was placed back in its traditional location following the confession and assurance liturgy. For three Sundays, the offerings were collected during the sending liturgy after a brief introduction by a member of the congregation.

At EPCRC, there are two offerings in the liturgy every Sunday. The first is for the congregation's General Fund. The second is for a special cause. On Sundays when the Lord's Supper is not celebrated, they are collected back-to-back. When the Lord's Supper is celebrated, the second offering is collected during a song following the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The congregation has some regular experience,

then, with having one of the offerings collected during the sending liturgy. For this reason, the experiment involved not only collecting both offerings during the sending liturgy, but also emphasizing the differentness and missional meaning by having a member of the congregation say a few words, prepared by the pastor, about the missional meaning of the second offering cause.

Collecting the offerings at the end of the worship service is fitting for the purposes of missional transformation because it focuses the attention of the congregants on what the grace of God might mean for one particular place in the world into which they are sent. According to the previous chapter's review of the missional literature, an offering can be understood as an extension of prayer rather than as good deeds. The person introducing the offering spoke about what God's grace, particularly in the threefold office of Jesus Christ, means for the particular offering cause. What does God do there in Jesus Christ? What do we pray he will do as we give?

At EPCRC, the offering schedule is prepared a year in advance by the deacons. The pastor plans the sermon series' independently. Because there was no intentional alignment between the theme of the sermon and the cause for the offering, no attempt was made to force an alignment of those two in the statement read by a member of the congregation. If that had been attempted, it seemed likely that a need to connect the sermon to the offering would compete with the need to speak missionally about the offering, and neither would end up being done well. For this project, the focus would be on the offering as a missional liturgy rather than on the offering as an application of the sermon.

On April 10, 2016, the second offering cause was for EPCRC's Building Fund. For thirteen years the Building Fund had been maintained to pay the mortgage for a building expansion. Six months before this experiment, that mortgage had been paid off, and the council appointed a team to propose projects to catch up on deferred maintenance and replace out-of-date décor. At the team's first meeting, they were given a missional vision for sprucing up the building: the point is not to make a nice building for the congregation but to improve the building and grounds for the sake of bringing the kingdom of God to the world. Through bulletin announcements and discussion at the annual December congregational meeting, the congregation had been made aware of this committee's mission, but many seemed still unclear about the role of the committee and the ongoing purpose of the Building Fund. This statement was given before the offering was collected:

I'm Ron,³ and I'm one of the people on the Building and Grounds Improvement Team. For more than a decade, the building fund was used primarily to pay off a mortgage this church had. But now that the mortgage is paid off, the council hopes to continue the building fund and use it to tackle important projects to improve and redecorate our building and grounds. The council asked our committee to prioritize and propose these projects. As a church, we don't just want a nice building. Our prayer is that God will use this building to bring his grace to a world that needs it—by using this building as a place where we are equipped to bring that message of grace and by using this building as a place where people are welcomed by the grace of God. God has been doing this. Let's work together as God continues to work in and through us.

In this statement, the church's building is imagined as a tool that God uses to equip worshipers to participate in Christ's prophetic office ("as a place where we are equipped to bring that message of grace"). Work on updating the church building is

³ All names have been changed.

also imagined as participation in Christ's priestly office by which God welcomes all kinds of people ("using this building as a place where people are welcomed by the grace of God").

On April 17, 2016, the second offering cause was the Christian school next door to the church. East Palmyra Christian School is not owned or operated by EPCRC, but it was started by parents at EPCRC and has close historical and current ties. It is a small school, with combined-grade classrooms. It is ecumenical, with more than 90% of the students belonging to churches other than EPCRC. It continues to be supported by the prayers, regular donations, and volunteer hours of members of EPCRC. The following statement was read before the offering:

I'm Brett, and Jessica and I have enrolled Mason as a kindergartner at East Palmyra Christian School for the fall. For almost 70 years, God has been teaching the students who went through East Palmyra Christian School to know him and renewing them to be his representatives in society. We take up two offerings a month for the school; we pray for the school; we volunteer for the school. Let's continue to work together for the children in our community. And may God continue to teach and transform these students for life in their families, in culture, in the marketplace, in government, and in all of creation for the good of God's kingdom.

With this statement, supporting the Christian school is presented as a participation in the work of Christ in his kingly office. Through the school, God equips these students to work for his kingdom.

On April 24, 2016, the second offering was collected for a foreign missionary being supported for the first time by the congregation. Two years earlier one of the supported missionaries retired, and the council recently decided to add this new foreign missionary, one suggested by the denomination's foreign missions agency.

The following statement was read before the offering (location redacted for the missionary's safety):

I'm Sharon, and I am the missions contact person at our church. For years we have supported foreign missionaries with money and prayers, and when the Timmers ended their service a few years ago, we had the opportunity to support someone new. Alexis was recommended to us by Christian Reformed World Missions because she is supported by some other churches in the Northeast, which makes visiting supporting churches easier. Alexis is a graduate of Calvin Seminary and is in [location redacted] in her last semester of formally studying Christian [language redacted] with extra emphasis on religious vocabulary. Her work in [location redacted] will probably involve encouraging and equipping pastors and leaders. As we continue to support Alexis, let's pray that God will bring many more people to faith in Jesus through the work of churches in [location redacted] and all over the world.

This statement imagines EPCRC's support of Alexis as a participation especially in Christ's prophetic office, proclaiming the good news so that the world can come to faith in him: "As we continue to support Alexis, let's pray that God will bring many more people to faith..."

Missional Commissioning

The third liturgical experiment occurred in May, 2016, with the offering and congregational prayer both returning to their traditional place after the confession and assurance liturgy. During the sending liturgy, one individual member of the congregation was invited forward to be commissioned for their ordinary work.

Schmit recommends that a commissioning like this include a description of the missional activity to be undertaken, a vow by the person, and a blessing.⁴ Anecdotally, the congregation has been wary of unfamiliar things that seem "high church." It seemed a liturgy like the one Schmit proposes might be experienced by

⁴ Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 159.

congregants as so “formally liturgical” as to be distracting. Because of this, the experiment at EPCRC followed more closely the recommendations of Neil Hudson for practicing what he calls “This Time Tomorrow.”⁵ Further research at EPCRC could shift the practice according to Schmit’s recommendations, and include a vow and a blessing, and test the differing effect.

For each of the three Sundays, a worshiper had been identified and asked to participate at least a week prior. That worshiper was told they would be invited forward and asked to describe their upcoming ordinary work and life and to identify missional opportunities and challenges. The pastor would then pray for that person based on their answers.

Focus group conversations in 2014 and 2016 indicated that members of EPCRC tend to think first of evangelism when asked questions that relate to participating in God’s work in the world. (The data collected from the 2016 focus groups will be described, analyzed, and interpreted in the next chapter.) At the first two focus group sessions in 2016, when the question “Tell me about a time when you tried to make the world a better place?” was asked, the responses almost always had to do with evangelism. This happened before this third experiment, and suggested that if the pastor asked the interviewee to identify “missional” opportunities, or opportunities to “do the work of God’s kingdom,” the interviewee would likely think only of evangelism. Furthermore, phrases like “participate in the mission of God” and “participate in what God is doing” were not likely to be clear to

⁵ Neil Hudson, *Imagine Church: Releasing Whole-Life Disciples* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 100-101.

the interviewee, based on the pastor's experience in the congregation. Hudson's suggested question—"What opportunities or challenges will you face?"—is supposed to elicit discussion of that person's engagement in mission. The pastor judged that this might best be accomplished in this congregation by appending "to serve God and love others" to that question. The intent was that these phrases would call to mind participation in Christ's kingly and priestly offices, respectively.

On May 1, 2016, Adam, a middle-aged member of the congregation was invited forward. He was prompted: "Tell us what you are going to do for the next week or two." Adam shared details of his day working in management at a machine tool shop. He was then asked, "What opportunities and challenges will you face in trying to serve God and love others as you do this?" He described the opportunity to be a friend, listen to, encourage, and act God-like among the people he worked with. He talked about the challenges of not having enough time and energy, but he especially talked of resisting the influences of negativity and being a positive person.

The congregation was led in a prayer that God would make all of the worshipers into his distinctive people and specifically that he would do this for Adam as he struggled against negativity. The prayer ended: "Give Adam that positivity that comes from knowing all that you have promised to us. Give him the positivity that comes from knowing that you have promised things we haven't even experienced yet. Give him the positivity that comes from knowing that you are faithful." This ending drew on the theme of the sermon, from the first chapter of Judges, that God's people should not grow satisfied with receiving only a little of what God has promised. Because God is faithful, his people should always yearn for

all that he has promised. The prayer for Adam imagined his struggle to be positive in amid negativity as a participation in Jesus Christ's kingly office—his faithfulness to bring his kingdom.

On May 8, 2016, Mothers' Day, a young mother and schoolteacher was invited forward. She was asked, "What will your week as a mother involve?" She described her daily routine, including getting her kids ready in the morning, teaching, then dinner and bedtime. She also described taking a day off to celebrate her three-year-old's birthday with him. She was then prompted: "What opportunities and challenges will you face to love God and serve especially your family this week?" She described the struggle to weigh her obligations as a teacher with her obligations as a mother and determine when it is appropriate to take time off. She asked for prayer that she would not feel guilty for taking time off to spend a day with family.

The congregation then was led in a prayer that God would sustain this woman as she juggled those responsibilities. The congregation prayed that God would assure her that he is with her and that his forgiveness covers all of her decisions as she scrutinizes the hard choices she has to make to be a good teacher and a good mother. The prayer ended with petitions for mothers in general. Because the prayer was thematic for Mothers' Day, and the sermon was not, no attempt was made to connect the themes of the sermon to the themes of the prayer. As with the second experiment, it seemed in this case that trying to combine the themes of the sermon, the themes of this woman's Mothers' Day commissioning, and the themes of mission would be too much to accomplish in a short prayer. The prayer did place

this woman's confidence to make decisions balancing her service to students and family in the context of Christ's priestly office, as the one whose forgives covers all of her decisions and gives her the boldness to do her best as she loves her students and her children.

On May 15, 2016, a high-school senior was invited to the front of the worship space. When asked, "Tell us what you're going to be doing when you graduate from high school," he told the congregation that he was going to be moving to Hawaii and working on a farm of a family friend. He explained that he was committed to it for a year, but could stay longer if he liked it. He was then asked, "What opportunities and challenges will you face to serve God and love others when you move there?" He talked about the opportunity to be a hard worker doing something he hasn't done before. He mentioned the challenge of finding his place in a new social group. He asked for prayers for safe travel, and that he would enjoy the work.

The prayer included petitions that God would be with him as he faced the vulnerabilities of new work and meeting new people and that God would teach him to depend, in his vulnerability, not on his own strength, but on God's power. The prayer concluded with the same petition for the whole congregation: "teach us not to depend on our strength, nor to shrink back because of our perceived weakness, but teach us to depend on your strength." The prayer connected directly with the sermon, which had the theme: "God doesn't need human power." Briefly, the sermon considered Jesus in his kingly office as one who conquers his enemies through death and resurrection rather than through instruments of human strength. Inasmuch as the prayer for this young man quoted the theme of the sermon, it presented his

anticipated struggles in Hawaii in the context of participation in Jesus Christ's kingly office.

Evaluation

The second part of each of the three liturgical experiments was an evaluation of the sending liturgies described above. The evaluation used data collected by one before-during-and-after focus group composed of nine individuals representing a cross-section of the congregation. Three of the members were younger than 35, three were between the ages of 35 and 65, and three were older than 65. Four were men; five were women. Three were fairly new members of the congregation, including one who was a newer believer. Five had never been in a leadership position in the congregation.

The three liturgical experiments described above consisted of three consecutive weeks of an atypical element in the sending liturgy specifically designed to facilitate the Spirit's missional formation. The focus group convened four times for about forty minutes immediately before the three services in which the use of a new liturgy began (March 13, April 10, May 1) and on the Sunday a week after the last use of the third tested liturgy (May 22).

The goal of the focus group conversations was to collect data that could confirm the hypothesis that liturgies designed to equip worshipers for missional participation in Christ's threefold office can facilitate missional transformation. For collecting this kind of data, focus groups have several advantages over questionnaires and individual interviews. Questionnaires can be used to collect large quantities of easy-to-tabulate, simple data, but this project does not need that

kind of data. Missional activity is hard to measure quantitatively and discretely. This thesis-project's hypothesis would be more clearly confirmed by the kind of deep, qualitative data that results from worshipers' careful self-reflection. The quality of the data would also be enhanced by the kind of cross-pollination that happens when one person's voiced self-reflection sparks a thought in another participant about their own experience. Focus groups allow for this. In fact, anecdotal evidence at EPCRC suggests that worshipers will be more comfortable talking about their successes and struggles in engaging in mission in a group rather than individually or through a questionnaire.

Because the evaluation had a before-during-and-after structure, the data collected from each focus group conversation needed to allow for comparison with other focus group sessions. However, the last three focus group sessions also needed to include questions that elicited data specific to the previous three weeks' experiment. In other words, the prompts used in the four focus group sessions would need to be similar enough to allow for comparison but different enough to meet the particularities of each missional liturgy.

This thesis-project presupposes that participation in Christ's threefold office with respect to others is a good way to describe what it means to be missional. The focus group was asked questions each time designed to collect data about their missional involvement in those three areas: "Tell me about a time in the last few weeks you tried to make the world a better place," "Who have you loved in the last few weeks, by forgiving them, praying for them, or serving them?" and "When have you recently talked to someone about God?" The first question is designed to

measure the participants' participation in Christ's kingly office, the second in his priestly office, and the third in his prophetic office. In order to test the participants' conscious awareness that doing these things is participation in Jesus Christ's work, a follow up question was asked periodically: "As you did that, what do you think God was doing?" Changes in the participant's responses to these prompts from one focus group sessions to another might indicate the relative impact of the intervening sending liturgies on their missional participation in Christ's threefold office.

These questions were generic. When first asked in each focus group session, the questions made no reference to the specific sending liturgy employed in the previous weeks. This has the advantage of potentially revealing what is on the participants' minds, independent from any suggestion from the researcher that the recent worship practices might have had an impact on them. One of the presuppositions of this thesis-project includes the idea that worship involves the bodily participation of the worshipers and operates especially on the level of habit. Allowing for a discussion of missional activity unfiltered by conscious reflection on liturgy could result in data about the habits of the worshipers and the subconscious impact of the liturgies.

Each of the last three focus group sessions also allowed for explicit reflection on the tested worship practices and the participants' self-awareness of the impact of those practices on their actions toward others. At appropriate points during the discussion, the researcher described and quoted words from the worship practices of the previous three weeks to ask whether those practices had any impact. Discussing the impact of these practices explicitly allowed participants to interact

with each other, confirming or challenging what others said. Each of the last focus group sessions ended with the researcher explicitly describing the hope of these worship practices—that they would have an impact on the worshipers' during-the-week actions toward others—and soliciting a recommendation from the group: based on their experience, should that liturgy be employed for that purpose? The last two focus group sessions included questions asking the participants to compare the most recent liturgy with the others.

Before the focus groups convened, it was expected that the group's responses to these questions would indicate that at least one of the liturgical practices tested played some role in forming the participants for missional participation according to Christ's threefold office. This would confirm the thesis that missional worship can play a role in the missional transformation of an established Reformed congregation.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

Liturgies designed to equip worshipers for missional participation in Christ's threefold office can play a role in the Holy Spirit's missional transformation of an established, Reformed congregation like East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church (EPCRC). That is the hypothesis described and tested in this thesis-project. The previous chapter described three new elements that were included in the sending liturgy at EPCRC, each for three weeks, during the Spring of 2016. A focus group met four times to evaluate how effective these liturgies would be in missional transformation. This chapter describes the data collected from those focus group conversations, summarizes some observational data collected by the pastor, and offers some analysis, interpretation, and recommendations based on that data.

The focus group met on March 13, April 10, May 1, and May 22, 2016 at 9:00 AM. The first meeting occurred before any new liturgy was introduced, and the final three occurred at the conclusion of each three-week experiment with a missional liturgy. Eight or nine of the nine participants were present for each of the conversations, and the group talked for about 35 minutes each time. For the focus group data to confirm this thesis-project's hypothesis, the participants would have to indicate that at least one of the liturgical practices tested played some role in forming them for missional participation according to Christ's threefold office. Some of the data indicates that this happened. It appears that the intercessory prayers and commissionings in the sending liturgy had some impact on the focus group participants' missional participation in Christ's threefold office.

Focus Group Data

The focus group was asked a variety of questions during each session. Earlier questions were designed to uncover the effect of the sending liturgies indirectly. With these questions, participants were prompted to reflect on the kinds of things they did outside of worship in recent weeks. It seemed possible that by analyzing and comparing these discussions from the various sessions, the impact of the sending liturgies would be noticeable.

With later questions, the participants were directly asked to describe the effect of the liturgies. They were also told what the liturgies were designed to do and were asked to give their recommendations.

The review will begin with the responses to the later, more direct questions and the request for recommendations because the interpretation of the data is more straightforward. Afterward, the review will turn to an analysis of the things discussed in response to the earlier, indirect questions.

Responses to Direct Questions

In each session, the focus group was asked to reflect directly on recent liturgies and their effect. During the first session, before any experiment had been conducted, the researcher asked what they remembered most about recent Sunday morning worship. During the last three sessions, the group was reminded of the content of the sending liturgies and asked whether those liturgies affected them in any way.

The answers during the later sessions contrasted with the first session. In the first focus group session, one participant mentioned a memorable sermon. Another

described how the practice of confession and assurance formed him. Other members spoke positively and negatively about the predictability of the liturgy. No one mentioned the sending liturgy, which had recently only consisted of a thematic song, a charge, a blessing, and a doxology.

In contrast, the group members readily talked about the impact of the sending liturgies in the later sessions. During the second focus group session, after the intercessory prayer had been included in the sending liturgy, participants spoke more readily, more openly, and in greater detail about the formative impact of worship, and specifically of those prayers. Some members reported on their inward participation in God's grace in Jesus Christ. Their faith was strengthened by renewed hope, knowing that God was in charge (particularly in response to prayers about the United States presidential primaries) and that the whole church was praying.

Most significantly for this thesis-project, some participants reported on their human-ward (missional) participation in God's grace in Jesus Christ, especially in his priestly office. Some said they were inspired to pray for others: "to know that you're praying for them reminds me to pray for them during the week." Others said that the prayers had made an impact on their treatment of others. One explained that she was more inclined to offer compassion and forgiveness to the difficult people she encounters in her work because of intercessory prayers that emphasized forgiveness for one another. Another told of how she was challenged to respond to news about terrorists with a heart to forgive. Perhaps in contrast, one participant wasn't sure whether the prayers had influenced her related missional activity.

Earlier in the focus group session, she had described visiting some elderly women in a local nursing home. When the group was later reminded that one of the prayers had included petitions for those who are forgotten, neglected, and excluded, this woman was asked whether the prayer influenced her decision to visit those women: “I don’t know, necessarily.” She thought she probably would have visited them anyway.

In the third focus group session, no participants explicitly described any effect of the offering on their participation in mission. In response to the prompt, the participants only offered criticism of and reflection on the practice of including a missionally-introduced offering in the sending liturgy.

In the final focus group session, the participants described a wide variety of effects of the commissioning liturgy. Almost every member of the group noted the positive effect on their sense of the unity of the church. Some focused on the way the commissionings seemed to make the congregation tighter-knit: “I like the fact that we got to know people personally;” “I didn’t know all that stuff about him.” Others were prompted to identify similarities between their own life experiences and those of the individuals who were commissioned.

These reflections seemed to indicate not simply a unity of familiarity, but a unity of discipleship—they had a sense not just that the church members were close to one another but that they were living life as disciples of Jesus together: “It’s nice to know there are other people going through things;” “I think it kind reiterated that we’re a family and a body.”

At least one member experienced this increased unity as he was reminded to remember and pray for those who were commissioned at various times of his day: the commissionings “helped to keep them in mind as you’re praying at night;” and “I’m loading a hole full of explosives, and I’m wondering what Adam is doing.” For at least two members, this increased unity was expressed in gratitude: “It makes you appreciative of your own position in life;” “I am a little bit more thankful.” Importantly for this project, one member seemed respond with an explicitly missional orientation, describing how one commissioning encouraged her to be more positive during the week around her acquaintances.

This thesis-project presupposes that missional activity is not merely general good works oriented toward others, but is participation in Christ’s work specifically. While the focus group participants reported that the prayers and commissionings had an impact on thoughts, prayers, and activities oriented toward others, nothing in the conversations indicated an increased awareness of the connection between their actions and the mission of Jesus Christ. Perhaps this was because the participants’ awareness is already high. In the first focus group conversation, some participants already expressed an awareness of the Christ-empowerment of their actions toward others: “I think simply by loving someone, the act of doing that is what God does to you.” What is God doing when we speak to others about Jesus? “Calling the person; bringing them to him...” In later conversations, participants would again occasionally express this awareness: Did the prayers remind them of what God was doing? “Yes,” affirmed one participant.

During the final session, the pastor described how he was able to incorporate the themes of the sermon into some of the sending liturgies but not others. The participants were also shown that they had responded more positively to those liturgies with sermonic themes. Did they think that including the theme of the sermon in the sending liturgy made a difference in how that liturgy impacted them? Some reported that they hadn't noticed a connection and didn't think it made a difference for them. Others reported that the connection was important: "I noticed every time you did it, and it made a difference for me."

In one session, a participant noted that some of the missional transformation effect of the liturgies might be attributable not to the specific liturgical elements used but to their newness. A change always directs attention to itself. In another session, two participants noted that some of the positive effect in their lives could be attributed not just to worship but to the focus group meetings: "I agree with Ned that these sessions have been really good because I'm very conscious during these last weeks of 'How do I live?' and 'How do I witness?'..."

As described above, participants were asked directly throughout the sessions to reflect on the impact of the missional liturgies. Their responses indicated that they consciously felt most influenced by the inclusion of intercessory, missional prayers in the sending liturgy and by the commissionings in the sending liturgy. After these sending liturgies, many were encouraged to engage more in missional participation in Christ's threefold office. In contrast, they reported that the offerings with missional introductions in the sending liturgy had little effect on their missional activity.

Recommendations from Participants

Based on their experiences, what would the participants recommend for a congregation that wants missional transformation? Would they recommend the practices EPCRC had experimented with? The focus group was asked a version of these questions at the end of the last three sessions.

During second session, after the experiment with intercessory prayer, several participants said they would indeed recommend the practice to other congregations: “I like it at the end of the service,” said one, “it leaves you with that as the last thing you hear before you go out into the world.”

During the third session, following the experiment with the offerings, several mentioned that they benefited from having their attention directed to what the offering was for: “It makes you think a little bit more [about] what the offering is actually about.” However, every recommendation was that the offering be placed back in the middle of the service and not at the end. Often, participants explained that they would rather not leave worship thinking about the offering cause because they want to leave thinking about the themes of the sermon: “...having that at the end of the service, I left there thinking about the Christian school, or I left thinking about what they were doing around the church right now recently, if it was for the Building Fund. I think then when I left, I was thinking more about that than about the sermon.” At the end of that third session, the participants were asked to make a recommendation via a show of hands. None voted for placing the offering during the sending liturgy. Three voted for keeping EPCRC’s traditional order or worship with the sermon very near the end of the service and the prayer and offerings earlier.

Five voted for placing the prayer in the sending liturgy.

In the last focus group session, participants were asked to reflect on which of the three sending liturgies most impacted their prayers, thoughts, and actions in the weeks following. A majority of the focus group reported that the commissionings had the greatest impact on them, although not everyone in that majority was willing to recommend commissionings as a means of missional transformation. Some members said that while they appreciated the commissionings, they would recommend including the intercessory prayer in the sending liturgy instead. There was some concern that a practice of weekly commissionings, no matter how beneficial, could not be sustained. One member recommended reverting to EPCRC's traditional order of worship.

In summary, the focus group was told a number of times that the sending liturgies were being evaluated for their potential to affect the during-the-week activity of worshipers toward others. For this purpose, participants recommended including intercessory prayers and commissionings in the sending liturgy, based on their experiences.

Indirect Responses

Earlier in each session, the focus group was asked generic questions about their missional activity. These questions were asked before specific liturgical elements were described in an attempt to get the participants to reveal any subconscious effect of the liturgy on their habits. They were prompted in three ways: to solicit reflection on their missional participation in Christ's prophetic office, they were asked to describe times they had spoken to someone about Jesus Christ;

to solicit reflection on their missional participation in Christ's priestly office, they were asked to describe people they had loved through forgiveness, prayer, or action; and to solicit reflection on their missional participation in Christ's kingly office, they were asked to describe times when they had worked to make the world a better place. They were also asked these questions during the first focus group session to get a comparison point for their responses after experiments had been conducted.

To analyze the data, each description of missional activity in the transcriptions of the focus group conversations was coded according to its most natural threefold office category: did the participant describe missional participation in Christ's prophetic, priestly, or kingly office? Interestingly, regardless of which question was asked ("making the world a better place," "loving someone," or "speaking to someone about Jesus"), at least half of the responses to the prompt were best categorized as participation in Christ's prophetic office—evangelism, namely. It is also notable that participants rarely described activities that could be classified primarily as participation in Christ's kingly office. A very few times, participants mentioned the kingly-office participation activities of engaging in leadership and striving to set a good example. Aside from those few, all of the responses were most naturally categorized as participation in Christ's priestly or prophetic offices. This may be because participants do not naturally make the theological distinctions this thesis-project presupposes. It may also be because participants value a kind of gospel-centrality that would keep verbal proclamation at the center of everything Christians do. The low incidence of kingly-participation activities might also be attributable to a valuing of interpersonal action. This thesis-

project presupposes that missional participation in Christ's threefold office often involves struggling against the impersonal—institutions and structures.

In order to facilitate the conversation, the strict demarcation between those questions ("making the world a better place," "loving someone," and "telling someone about Jesus") was dropped after the second conversation. Participants were not making those distinctions, and the free and natural flow of the conversation was being interrupted by the researcher's attempt to force the distinction. Throughout the course of the experiments, there was no obvious change in the kinds of activities participants described engaging in—whether kingly, priestly, or prophetic.

Importantly for this thesis-project, there was a noticeable similarity between some of the activities participants described and the details of the sending liturgies used. It was mentioned above that one woman visited some residents of a nursing home after prayers for those who are excluded and marginalized, although when asked directly later, she didn't think the prayer had prompted her to do that.

One participant told of how she had been moved to forgive someone—and she then reminded the group of an intercession for those who needed to forgive and be forgiven. In the third session, a woman described feeling guilty for not having invited an acquaintance to church after that person expressed concern that they wanted to go to a small church where they would be welcomed. One of the sending liturgies before that session referred to EPCRC's building and making it a welcoming place. In the last focus group session, three participants noted that they had prayed for someone or had encouraged others in their lives to pray about their struggles.

This followed commissioning liturgies in which members of the congregation told of their lives and were prayed for in worship. In that same session, one participant described his efforts to be diligent in his work in response to the prompt about “making the world a better place.” This followed three weeks of commissionings in which all three participants had, in some way, reference their own efforts to be diligent. All of these reports from participants came before the group was explicitly reminded of the recent liturgies by the researcher.

While causation between the liturgical elements and the activities described by the focus group participants cannot be determined, the descriptions of missional activity given in response to the indirect prompts did seem to confirm what the participants later directly reported: some of the sending liturgies did have an effect on them and their missional activity.

Observational Data

In addition to the data collected in the focus group conversations, the pastor made some relevant observations. First, some of the liturgical elements took on missional themes more easily than others. The intercessory prayers easily allowed the integration of sermon and threefold-office missional themes. Perhaps this is because the pastor was already accustomed to including the themes of the sermon and a missional orientation in the intercessory prayer.

In contrast, it was difficult to include missional themes and three-office themes in the introductions to the offering causes. No attempt was made to include the themes of the sermon. With only a few sentences to work with, it did not seem possible to include those themes as well.

During the commissionings, the pastor had little control over whether the interviewee focused on truly missional themes of participation in Christ, that is, on activities oriented toward others. As a result, the commissionings seemed to have little explicit missional content. The worshipers being commissioned were inclined to speak more about their inward participation in Christ rather than their outward participation toward others.

Second, there was a wide variety in the time and effort it took to plan for each of these experiments. Moving the intercessory prayer to the sending liturgy and ensuring that it connected with sermonic and missional themes took no more time and effort than composing the traditional prayer and praying it in the traditional spot. Soliciting members of the congregation to introduce the offering cause and composing the statement took more time and effort. In a congregation where lay participation in worship is somewhat uncommon, it was difficult to find a worshiper who both had some relationship to the offering cause (that is, some reason to be the person introducing it) and was willing to read the statement.

Finding congregants willing to be commissioned was easy and required little preparation. Worshipers who are not accustomed to lay participation in worship leadership are nevertheless willing to join the pastor in the front of the worship space and answer questions their lives, it seems. Preparation required simply giving the person the list of two or three questions ahead of time. (However, as noted, this resulted in commissionings that had less missional content than intended.)

Third, the pastor received a variety of input from other members of the congregation. A worship committee meets every other month to coordinate among

those who assist in worship and to plan the trajectory of worship. In a meeting following this project, the worship committee members encouraged the pastor to change the order of worship more often. After the commissionings had ended, a couple of worshipers asked for them to return. An elder expressed his preference that nothing new be added to the sending liturgy, in order to keep the sermon near the end of the service. He said that he had not noticed and did not see the value in having the intercessory prayer reflect the themes of the sermon. Later, he seemed encouraged by the idea that if the intercessory prayer comes in the sending liturgy in the future, the pastor might explain, just before he prays, that the prayer will reflect the themes of the sermon. This elder thought that he might benefit more from the prayer if the pastor explicitly drew attention to that connection.

Recommendations for Further Research

Participants in the focus group consistently confirmed, both directly and indirectly, that including missional intercessory prayers and commissionings in the sending liturgies affected their own missional participation in Christ's threefold office. The data collected for this thesis-project, however, is by no means complete. Much more needs to be examined to learn how established congregations like EPCRC can effectively pursue missional transformation through liturgy. Future researchers would be advised to consider the following:

More research needs to be done to measure the effect of other missional liturgies and to measure the effect in other settings. What about a congregation that already includes prayers, offerings, and commissionings in the sending liturgy? What would be effective for that congregation? One participant noted that the

newness of the sending liturgies had contributed to their effect on her. Would missional prayers and offerings in the sending liturgy continue to be effective after some period of time, when they are no longer new? Would the changes be as effective in a congregation with more week-to-week variety in the order of worship than EPCRC? Further researchers should continue to collect data about the impact of liturgical changes on the missional activity of worshipers.

Missional transformation also involves more than just some individuals engaging in more missional activity. J R Woodward emphasizes that being missional cannot simply be a matter of strategy or planning; it must be about culture, whether in an established congregation or a church plant.¹ Aubrey Malphurs, writing about congregational transformation, also writes of the importance of culture.² This thesis-project took some of this advice into account, presupposing that experimentation is necessary for transformation because this is part of effecting culture change. The testing phase of the thesis-project did not and was not designed to measure cultural change, however. Using liturgy to effect culture change would require long-term experimentation and continual adjustment of the liturgies based on feedback. This thesis-project measured whether some individuals were effected to some extent in their missional participation in Christ over a short period of liturgical change. Further research should study the effect of liturgical changes on congregational culture, which would require a longer-term research.

¹ J R Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), esp. 19-32.

² Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern and Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), esp. 13-18.

In conjunction with the previous point, further research should specifically examine the role of discipleship. Two participants noted that the focus group sessions had made them more attentive to the worship practices and to their missional activity. Admittedly, it is impossible to test without affecting the results by the mere act of testing. However, this observation by those participants suggests a topic for further research: how might certain outside-of-worship discipleship practices (like the focus group conversations) support the transformational effect of missional liturgies? Christopher J. Schoon studied this question in a ThD thesis, arguing that what is truly needed for missional transformation is not only liturgy, but praxis-oriented discipleship, which involves personal and communal practices.³ His research, and the research here, could be followed-up by field research into the impact of discipleship practices coupled with missional liturgies.

Recommendations for Congregations

The data collected from the focus group confirmed this thesis-project's hypothesis. Specifically, by the grace of God the Holy Spirit, some individual worshipers found themselves increasingly and more intentionally engaging in missional participation in Christ's threefold office when the congregation as a whole prayed missional, intercessory prayers that drew on the themes of the sermon in the sending liturgy. A similar effect was observed when individuals were invited forward to describe their own struggles and opportunities to engage in mission in their ordinary lives and commissioned them to that work. These practices seemed

³ Christopher J. Schoon, "Toward a Communally Embodied Gospel: Exploring the Role of Worship in Cultivating an Evangelistic Character among God's People within the Missional Church Movement," (ThD thesis, Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto, 2016).

to be fruitful and not particularly labor-intensive by the worship leader. Any leaders who desire missional transformation for their congregations should consider these practices. Two additional recommendations arise from the focus group and observational data:

First, worship leaders should consider including the themes of the sermon in any liturgies designed to support missional transformation. In fact, worship leaders might consider explicitly drawing attention to the inclusion of those sermonic themes. At EPCRC, some worshipers noticed when the themes of the sermons were present in the tested liturgies and mentioned that the inclusion of those themes made the liturgies more effective for them. Other worshipers didn't notice. One who didn't notice thought it would help if the connection between the sermon and the other liturgical element was made explicit. Directly explaining how any missional sending liturgy draws on the themes of the sermon might help ease the discomfort of those who want to depart worship thinking about the themes of the sermon and are concerned that an additional worship element will draw their attention away from the sermon. If it is pointed out that the sending liturgy includes the themes of the sermon, they might more readily engage in that liturgy and be formed by it.

Second, congregational leaders might consider teaching the congregation to make good distinctions regarding mission and to identify legitimately missional activity. Focus group participants did not seem to make the same distinctions between different kinds of missional activity presupposed by this thesis-project. When they were asked about missional activity, they tended to think primarily of evangelism. Furthermore, those who were commissioned did not seem to make the

distinction between a missional orientation and a non-missional orientation, that is, between participation in Christ for their own benefit and participation in Christ for the benefit of others. Perhaps the pastor contributed to this confusion by using the phrase “serve God” to describe participation in Christ’s kingly office as opposed to his priestly office (“love others”)—when, in fact, the phrase “serve God” also appropriately describes the God-ward orientation of participation in each of Christ’s threefold office. Nevertheless, those who were commissioned at EPCRC were supposed to be commissioned to mission, but many of them spoke just as much, if not more, about their own internal reception of God’s grace. Congregational leaders might consider whether their congregations need to learn distinctions like these in order for missional liturgy to have maximal impact. Teaching these distinctions can perhaps even be done in commissionings, as participants are guided by the interviewer to comment on specific missional activity: “You’ve told us how you need God’s grace personally. But perhaps we can talk also about your missional opportunities. Tell us how God might use you to bring his grace to the other people in your life this week.”

Conclusion

This thesis-project has revealed two fruitful missional worship practices: intercessory prayers and commissioning to ordinary life, both as sending liturgies at the conclusion of corporate worship. These worship practices can be part of the missional transformation of a congregation like East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church (EPCRC).

This thesis-project's field research was located in an established, Reformed congregation in rural Upstate New York during a time when "missional" is becoming a more and more common word. Changes in the broader culture and observations made at EPCRC in particular suggest that the congregation could benefit from missional transformation that involves corporate worship.

The thesis-project presupposed that other-oriented participation in Christ's threefold office is a good way to understand what it means to "be missional" in confessionally Reformed congregation. It also presupposed that liturgy is an effective tool for transformational, equipping leadership according to this theology of mission.

The project depended on the work of previous researchers—those who have explored in what ways worship should be used as an instrument of mission and how missionally transformative worship should be defined: when the Holy Spirit leads a congregation to greater missional activity using liturgies designed to form worshipers for participation in Christ's threefold office with respect to the world. Previous researchers have described a variety of practices as "missional worship," some fitting the definition above better than others. This thesis-project settled on three promising practices: intercessory prayers prayed in the sending liturgy, offerings received and causes explained in the sending liturgy, and congregants being commissioned to their ordinary work in the sending liturgy. Each of those three liturgical elements were implemented for three-week trials at EPCRC and their impact was tested through focus group interviews.

The thesis-project hypothesized that some of these liturgical elements would result in increased missional activity among the participants of the focus group, confirming that liturgy could play a role in missional transformation. Indeed, the participants indicated that the intercessory prayers and commissionings in the sending liturgy had some impact on their missional participation in Christ's threefold office.

Does EPCRC want to continue down a path of missional transformation? Do other congregations like EPCRC want to discover and pursue a similar path of missional transformation? If so, this thesis-project suggests that as a congregation brings intercessions for the world before God as they are about to enter that world and as they commission each other for their missional work in that world, they can learn to participate in Christ's work as prophet, priest, and king toward the people around them. These liturgies are especially appropriate for worshipers who want to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit transforming them for mission.

APPENDIX

TWO SURVEYS OF WORSHIPERS IN SPRING, 2015

Two congregational surveys were conducted at East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church in the Spring of 2015. The method of conducting both surveys was the same. Immediately following the Sunday morning worship service, cardstock questionnaires and small pencils were distributed at the end of each of the three aisles to every adolescent and adult worshiper. The respondents had about a minute to complete the three-question surveys as they entered a bottleneck between the exit of the sanctuary and the fellowship hall. The survey collection boxes were located near the coffee and near the exit.

The first survey was conducted on Sunday, April 12, 2015. Three questions were asked, each about how well the respondents could describe what had happened during the worship service:

- #1. "How well could you describe the words Pastor Nick used in the prayer of confession this morning?"
- #2. "How well could you describe the main points or theme of the sermon?"
- #3. "How well could you describe what we were sent out to do at the end of this morning's worship service?"

In order to encourage responses by minimizing embarrassment, the respondents were not asked to disclose what they remembered. They were only asked to signify, using a five-point Likert scale, how well they could describe each of those three things: "1 – very poorly" to "5 – very well". About 80 surveys were distributed and 74 valid responses were returned.

	Median Response	Remembered Worse than the Charge	Remembered Just as Well as the Charge	Remembered Better than the Charge
#1: Confession	4	35%	57%	8%
#2: Sermon	5	15%	73%	12%
#3: Charge	5	-	-	-

Table 2. Responses to the First 2015 Questionnaire

Two things seem especially notable about the responses. The first is how well, overall, the worshipers claim to be able to describe the parts of the worship service. For each question, more than 80% of respondents answered with a 4 or a 5. For the third question, this rate was 97%. As noted in chapter 1, there are several possible explanations. Perhaps respondents wanted to encourage their pastor, who was conducting the survey. Perhaps respondents wanted to grade themselves well because they think of themselves as attentive worshipers. If the responses can be taken at face value, they suggest that worshipers take note of the liturgy.

A second notable feature of the data is how well worshipers could describe the content of the charge at the end of the service in comparison to the sermon and the prayer of confession. In these responses, the charge and the sermon score better than the prayer of confession. This suggests that if the worshipers ought to remember some content from the worship service (at least immediately afterward) it might be more effective to place this content in the charge than in the prayer of confession. In sum, the first survey vindicates this thesis-project's assumption that the sending liturgy can play a role in the missional transformation of East Palmyra CRC.

The second survey was conducted on Sunday, May 10, 2015. Again, three questions were asked, but this time about the previous Sunday's worship service and the respondents' activity during the previous week:

- #1. "Did you attend East Palmyra CRC's morning worship service last week?"
- #2. "Did you think about or do anything during the past week specifically in response to last week's worship service?"
- #3. "Last week, the service ended with these words:... To what extent did you do that this past week?"

Only those responding positively to the first question were instructed to answer the second and third questions. Again, about 80 surveys were distributed, 72 were returned, and 53 respondents indicated that they had been present at the previous week's worship service. The following represents the answers given by those 53 respondents:¹

	Yes			No	
#2. Did you do anything specifically in response?	38%			60%	
	1	2	3	4	5
#3. To what extent did you do what the charge said?	6%	28%	38%	19%	6%

Table 3. Responses to the Second 2015 Questionnaire.

Notably, the respondents were much less positive than in the previous survey. While 97% of respondents in the previous survey said they could describe what they were sent out to do at the end of the worship service, only 63% of respondents answered with a 3 or higher to the question of to what extent they did what they were sent out to do, and only 38% of respondents reported doing anything specifically in response to the worship service.

¹ Some respondents only answered one of the second and third questions, which accounts for totals that do not equal 100%.

There are several possible explanations for this. One might be differences in the worship services being considered—the worship of April 10 might have been much more engaging and/or formational than the worship of May 3. Respondents, having taken a previous survey recently, were perhaps “settling in” to taking surveys and feeling freer to offer more honest (i.e. more negative) answers. Respondents, having taken a previous survey, were perhaps feeling bothered by taking a second survey, and recorded their survey fatigue with more negative answers. Respondents may have interpreted the previous survey as a reflection on the pastor, but the second survey as a reflection on themselves, and felt freer to evaluate themselves negatively. Aside from all these possibilities, the results at least suggest that there is much room for worshipers at East Palmyra Christian Reformed Church to improve in their missional response to worship.

Also notable is the lack of a strong correlation between the responses to the second and third questions. For example, of the respondents who indicated they did not do anything specifically in response to the previous week’s worship service, about half nevertheless indicated that the extent to which they did what they were sent out to do was either 3 or 4 out of 5. (No one said they did nothing specifically in response, and then gave themselves a 5 for their response.) This suggests that worshipers are often doing what they are sent out to do without doing it consciously or intentionally, at least with respect to that week’s charge.

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